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FRENCH HOME LIFE

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PREFACE.

A GREAT deal has been written about Life in France, but the subject is so large that it can never be exhausted.

There always are, and always will be, new details to supply—new opinions to express upon it.

So long, therefore, as English readers continue to feel interest in the condition of the French, no excuse is needed for adding to the large stock of volumes which exist already on the question.

In republishing these Essays in a collected form, the writer hopes that they may serve to show what some of the springs of French Home Life at this moment are; or, more exactly, what they appear to be to an English looker-on, who has lived for a quarter of a century in France, amidst ties and affections which have made that country his second home.

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FRENCH HOME LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

SERVANTS.

SERVANTS constitute one of those awkward topics of which nobody likes to talk; which are alluded to because they force themselves obstinately upon our attention, but from which we all run away as fast as we can, without attempting to find a solution for the difficulties they present. Such cowardice does not help us, however, for servants and the worries they cause pursue us all over the world, unaffected by changes of latitude or of government. They are not imposed upon us by nature, we voluntarily subject ourselves to them; and of all the tyrannies to which civilisation and vanity have made us bow our heads, there is not one from which we suffer more, or which we are less able to

resist. Even habit, that soother of discomforts—even time, that curer of sorrows—even reason, that guide which we consider so infallible in religion and politics,—fail to reconcile us to servants: we continue to impatiently support them—we live side by side with them as with hereditary enemies; and the more advanced amongst us complain of the slow progress of mechanical invention, which has not yet discovered the secret of the automata who make the beds and wait at dinner in that privileged country, Vril-ya.

But, irritating as the topic may be—humiliating as it is to recognise that we are not masters in our own houses, and that one of the most evident results of the progress achieved during the nineteenth century is that, in fact, we have grown to be abject subjects where, in theory, we are supposed to be despotic rulers—surely there is no wisdom in evading discussion on the matter. The evil has become wellnigh intolerable to most of us; it has assumed a development which encircles us day and night. We writhe, we moan, in a suffocated whisper, to our dearest friend; but, with all our energy, we dare not speak out;—we let the monster go on, growing bigger, crushing us under his nightmare-weight. And yet we have social science congresses, and we live in a country of public meetings and individual initiative, and we

are a free people—at least we say so—and we are surrounded by reformers of all kinds, and we sing and conscientiously believe that "Britons never shall be slaves." The clearest fact which results from all this is, that the patriot who wrote "Rule Britannia" was a short-sighted man, who in no way foresaw the future destiny of the nation. Slaves we have become, and, to judge from present appearances, slaves we seem likely to continue. We clink our chains, and mourn, and own that they are cruelly heavy, and that they eat into our flesh, but there is not a man or a woman amongst us who raises the cry of liberty. If ever the odious question is alluded to, it is only for an instant; no one dares seriously to take it up; and if, at any peculiarly bitter moment, the provocation becomes insupportable, and some desperate sufferer writes wildly to the newspapers to say that he is going mad or dying from domestic difficulties, the only answer he gets is a wise and prudent leader, proving, by commanding logic, that the whole affair is one of proportion between demand and supply. He is told that, in consequence of the general increase of wealth, more people are able to pay for servants on the one hand, while fewer people are willing to become servants on the other; that our wants are growing, while the means of supplying them are diminishing; and that, some day or other, there

will be no more servants to be found—just as we are assured that in 1934 there will be no more coal. Of a possible solution of the difficulty, in part at least, not one word will be said; to a possible modification of the existing relations between masters and servants not an allusion will be made; to the experience of foreign countries in the matter, in order to consider whether it offers any teaching to ourselves, not a reference will be suggested; the latter notice, indeed, would be beneath the dignity of a true-born Englishman, who believes, of course, that however bad things may be in his own land, they are necessarily worse abroad. Let us, however, sacrifice our dignity for a few minutes, and see what we can discover across the Channel: if, after all, we should learn something there, perhaps we may decide to condescend to see what use we can make of it at home. Our malady is so grave that it really is worth while to inquire if it exists elsewhere; if so, what are its symptoms, its causes, and its consequences, and what are the remedies prescribed for it in other cases than our own.

We all of us remember our first impression of French servants; it was that both men and women wear white aprons which cover up their bodies, and that the sexes are mainly distinguished by pumps and white stockings which come out under the apron in the case of a man, and by the crispest

of white caps which comes out above it in the case of a woman. We further recollect that both men and women seemed to chatter with prodigious rapidity, and that they laughed most disrespectfully while they were talking to us. It must be owned that a good many British travellers never get beyond these first impressions, and that their view of the domestics of France is limited to the details just indicated. It may be said without exaggeration that this view is superficial and incomplete, and that the subject includes something more than aprons, pumps, caps, volubility, and hilarity. Furthermore, the ordinary voyager, however far he may attempt to carry his investigations of the inner nature of hotel and *café* servants, has no opportunity of extending his studies into private houses, where the true interest of the matter lies; he is forcedly restricted to a narrow and inferior range of observation, which offers the disadvantage of including only individuals who, by constant contact with the public, have acquired the special habits and the special manners which belong to their particular class, and which are very different from those of their colleagues in private service. The natural result is, that the traveller who has no other means of judging, arrives at an opinion which, even if it be correct in itself, refers only to a limited and exceptional category of domestics.

That opinion generally is that French servants, of both sexes, are clean, active, cheery, and willing; but that they are utterly disrespectful, and are sometimes of doubtful honesty, and of still more doubtful morality. This description is approximately exact. There are, of course, numerous exceptions to it in all its elements, and it allows no margin for the infinite varieties and shades of character which are so abundantly developed amongst waiters and chambermaids by the mere effect of the life they lead; but, with these reserves, the opinion may be said to be, on the whole, a true one. It represents the maximum of experience acquired on the subject by the majority of our countrymen; and it may perhaps be fair to own at once that in itself it is not of a nature to dispose them to recognise any superiority of French servants over English. It must, however, be observed, that English people unconsciously compare the hotel waiters they meet with across the Channel to their own private servants at home; and that if the decision is, not unnaturally, in favour of the latter, it is because these have at all events the merit of knowing the more finished details of their trade better than the dish-carriers and floor-scrubbers who cumulate so many varied functions in French inns. But if, instead of putting the latter into scale against British butlers, we honestly

weigh them out with their parallels in England—with the greasy-coated, dough-faced, perspiringly important, pretentious, prematurely ancient individuals, who serve us in most of the hotels of the United Kingdom—we must acknowledge, if we tell the truth, that the advantage lies with the supple Gaul, who has no pride, is rarely out of temper, is everywhere at once, can do thirteen things at the same time, and looks clean even if he is not so. Solemn respectability, massive inactivity, and grubby dirt, cannot be said to really constitute a smart servant; ubiquity, indefatigable zeal, and a cheery laugh, are higher qualities, even if they be accompanied by the sauciness and familiarity which Englishmen so ruthlessly resent.

Here, however, arises a second difficulty in the way of our just appreciation of French servants. We are so accustomed to sham in this island-realm, that we call for it in almost every detail of our existence. We do not permit our servitors to manifest an opinion before us; we extort from them simulated respect; we impose upon them the obligation of utter silence in our redoubtable presence; we forbid them to be men or women with hearts and feelings, and only accept them as machines because we are too superb to do anything whatever for ourselves. It never occurs to us that we may perchance be rousing bitter hate in the

minds we crush; that we may be piling up unpardoning enmities against ourselves and our class; that we may, each of us in our sphere of action, be fomenting social divisions which will some day bring about the revolution which Europe says we shall have to support in our turn. We laugh contemptuously at Europe—of course we know our own affairs better than ignorant foreigners—and we go on sternly keeping up our dignity and grinding down our servants. It is useless to argue from exceptions, and to talk about "faithful retainers who have been in the family for forty years." Faithful retainers no longer constitute the mass of English households, though there are still many of them in Scotland; and we are so thoroughly accustomed to treat our men and maids as our inferiors before God and man, and to the prostrate servility which we wring from them, that the audacious freedom of the French seems to us to be contrary to the highest and noblest laws of nature. Of course this is not true of every one of us; there are kind masters and gentle mistresses in England: but who will deny that the rule is the other way, and that nearly all of us are necessarily influenced in our judgment of foreign servants by the habits which we have formed for ourselves at home? Still we are a tolerably well-intentioned race; some of us really want to be fair and honest;

and, despite our prejudices and our ignorance, we do not always refuse to give our attention to new arguments, because the facts on which they are based shock our artificial sentiments of propriety. It may not, therefore, be altogether useless to attempt to show, that possibly the Frenchman may be right and the Englishman wrong in this grave question; that a certain liberty of attitude, a certain sincerity of speech, a certain recognition of mutual equality, may not only induce a higher moral tone in the relations between masters and servants, but may, incredible as it sounds to English ears, actually improve the value and utility of the servant.

And there is another reason for considering this element of the question. It is difficult to appreciate the French servant in his various aspects, without first defining the political conditions under which he lives. Since 1789 he has been legally the equal of his master; since 1830 he has slowly grown to a distinct consciousness of the theoretical equality which exists between himself and the family he serves; since 1851 he has become an elector like his master and his master's son, and has as much voice as they have in the direction of the destinies of France. In the consequences they produce, these conditions apply as thoroughly to women-servants as to men; and though the greater

subtleness and tact of the female mind render their manifestation more difficult to detect in women, the sentiment of non-inferiority to her mistress is as really imbedded in the heart of a cook or a *femme de chambre*, as in the brain of a Radical footman or a Communist groom. The difference is, that the woman feels it and the man thinks it; with one it is an instinct, with the other it is a conviction; but in both cases it lifts up the level of personal dignity, it softens manners, and renders the heart more capable of good feeling towards a master whose superiority is only admitted as a temporary accident, and in no way as an inherent right. This, however, is but the ideal view of the case; this is the aspect which it ought to present if everybody were good—the aspect which it really does offer in a great many cases, but not in all. There are numerous examples of a diametrically opposite result, where the sentiment of equality raises hatred instead of sympathy in the servant's mind, on the ground that equality is but a name and a delusion, and that the rights and duties which it is supposed to imply are realised on neither side. Still, looking at the question as a whole, throughout all France, it is incontestable, allowing largely for exceptions, that the levelling of classes has generally done good; it has helped to raise the moral and political value of each individual affected by it, and has

contributed to the consolidation of the conservative principles which are now so widely spread amongst French indoor servants. The material effect of the idea of equality—that is to say, its influence on the personal relations between master and servant—naturally varies with character and temperament; but there is no exaggeration in saying that, as a rule, it makes home life more agreeable.

At first sight it is difficult for an Englishman even to conceive that a servant can, in any shape or way, be on a par with his master; the mere fact that one serves the other is, according to the prejudices in which we are brought up, an absolute bar to equality of any kind. The consequence is, that we regard the idea as a democratic dream, or, at best, as a legal fiction which is not realised in the practical working out of life. In this we are wrong, as in many other of our appreciations of foreign existence. Equality between master and man is a reality in France, but it is an equality of a special character, which evidences itself in a peculiar manner. It in no way involves a shade of doubt as to the temporary superiority of the employer over the employed; it in no way diminishes the habitual deference and respect of manner which is expected from a servant; it in no way affects the privilege of the master to command, or the duty of the servant to obey; but it

maintains intact between the two the pre-existing abstract truth that in morals and in law one is as good as the other; it preserves unweakened and undisputed an anterior privilege which is above all momentary relations; it covers the dignity of the server towards the served, and keeps them both assured that directly they separate their relative positions will once more become identical—not, of course, in the passing accident of social rank, but in the universal bond of common humanity. Hence it is that we see French masters so often friendly with their servants; hence it is that we hear them talk together about the affairs of the family; hence it is that service in France so frequently assumes almost the form of affectionate intimacy. In England we should fear, if we consulted a servant's opinion, that we should thereby destroy the barrier which we think it necessary to maintain between him and us; in France there is no barrier to destroy—there is only a tacit recognition of a connection, which, while it lasts, suspends equality. The master sacrifices nothing in chatting and laughing with his servant, for he feels that behind the servant lies the man: the servant gains nothing by the act, for he considers it to result from a fundamental right of which the exercise is temporarily regulated by the obedience which he voluntarily incurred when he accepted his place. Surely this

is a far higher standard than the one we employ; surely there is here the indication of a possible remedy for the ills we suffer from; surely an appeal to mutual dignity would help us in our own households.

But this definition of the nature of the equality in question would be far too absolute if it were left without restrictions. It is fair and true in principle, but human weaknesses modify it terribly in practice. It is not everybody who possesses tact or sense enough to apply with skill and moderation the principle that differences of station are but the results of hazard, and involve no difference in reality. Bad tempers are not unfrequent across the Channel, and bad tempers are bad guides to obedience, where obedience is only a passing duty, which can be cast aside at any moment. Sudden ruptures are therefore not unfrequent in France; a dispute may grow out of nothing, and in five minutes your servant may tell you that he packs up his box and goes. Such precipitate separations are not possible in England, where a month's notice must be given, and where servants are absolutely dependent on their "character from their last place;" but in France, where the notice is reduced to eight days, with the option on either side of paying eight days' wages instead of notice, and where servants generally get places almost without any references

at all, they have little to fear from an instantaneous abandonment of a situation. This part of the subject will presently be again referred to; but this allusion to it shows that the sentiment of equality, coupled with the liberty of action which the law allows, may produce very disagreeable commotions in a well-organised house, and that it is quite possible that all your servants may leave you without warning on the very day you have selected for a large dinner-party. Such an extreme case as this may possibly never have occurred; if ever it did, it may be asserted with certainty that it was the master's fault; for in the largest experience no example can be found of an entire household leaguing and quitting together without good reason. But in almost every family isolated instances of sudden departure have occurred, where the cook has flung her saucepans into the air, or the *valet de chambre* has thrown down his broom, or the lady's-maid has sworn she will sew no more. Such facts prove that the French system is not perfect, and that French servants are not always pleasant; but they are exceptions—the rule is the other way; and individual cases cannot be urged as serious arguments against the theory of equality, or the practices which grow from it. They only show that we are not all of us worthy of the advantages we possess; but as we knew that already,

we could dispense with this additional evidence, especially as it is only supplied at the cost of considerable inconvenience to French masters and mistresses, who, from better education and more command of temper, are generally less to blame than their servants for any violent scene which may take place between them.

The merits of the equality theory are, however, more numerous than its defects. Not only does it permit and encourage, as has been already observed, a sympathetic and friendly nature of relations between the two parties to it, but, as a consequence of those relations, it provokes in the servant a real interest in the people with whom he lives; it disposes him to serve cheerily and well; it takes out of his heart the sting of paid inferiority; it encourages him to view his work more as a service which is thankfully recognised, than as menial labour performed for wages; it lifts him to Conservatism. Such feelings as these really do exist amongst many French servants: not that they understand them clearly enough to be able to define and analyse them; no—they take the simpler form of half-unconscious impulses, of which one sees the result rather than the cause; but the result is so unmistakable and so general that it authorises the spectator to conclude that the cause exists. If general conclusions do not satisfy us, if we seek to

confirm them by individual proofs, we find them in abundance around us; curious developments of character offer themselves for investigation; the better qualities seem to have grown to the surface; we learn that old defects have diminished or disappeared; and all this seems natural and unimportant to the people directly interested. But to the philosophical observer it furnishes a glimpse into the only probable solution of the social difficulties of our time; it shows what can be effected by mutual esteem and a mutual recognition of rights. While nearly all France is agitated by the aspirations of the producing classes, while the workmen in the cities are openly avowing their intention of suppressing everything above them, and while the peasants are as openly proclaiming that the land should belong solely to those who till it, we find in the one class of domestic servants absolutely opposite opinions and desires. They are educated upwards, not only by the daily contact of masters who treat them well, but by the effective application, in their case, of the theory of equality; they have learnt by experience that they have nothing to gain by revolutions; they offer us the only example which yet exists in France of the possibility of practically settling the war of classes. It is true that they are utterly unconscious that they have done anything of the sort. A Parisian

femme de chambre would smilingly reply, "Monsieur mocks at me," if you were to tell her that she is a great political fact, that her affection for the family she serves is a social argument, and that if she hates Communism as much as her mistress does, it is because she has been in a position which has enabled her to grow through Communism into the safer ground beyond. And yet all this is true,—none the less true because the white-capped maiden does not comprehend a word of it. All she knows is that Madame is kind to her, and that she likes Madame.

It certainly cannot be fairly said that the "I'm-as-good-as-you-are" feeling is demonstrated in an offensive form by French servants. They do laugh sometimes, that is true; but why should they not? Laughing is one of the highest privileges of humanity. If, resolutely discarding early prejudice, we try to get to the bottom of the question, can we honestly pretend that, with the exception of the habit which our will and pride have imposed upon him, there is any reason whatever why a servant should not laugh? There would be considerable inconvenience and impropriety in his joining in all our conversations, and laughing always at our stories; but in the measure which our relative positions permit (which the French servant generally has discrimination enough to exactly detect), what

possible logic can we use against his right to smile? In France it is one of the manifestations of his equality with you; and the masters who forbid their servant to laugh in their presence (there are some) are abhorred in return, and will stand a bad chance if ever they should need protection from him in a revolution. But if he laughs, it is not familiarly; he is even grateful to you for permitting him to do it: for it should be observed that, after all, however much he may pretend to be convinced that he is your equal, he always has a lurking doubt about it, so strong is the influence of first education. He laughs courteously, slightly bowing to you as if to somewhat excuse himself; and the instant you cease to laugh he stops too. The master who cannot stand that must have an over-sensitive, ill-conditioned mind. And even if the French servant does a little shock you by the total absence in his manner of the icy servility to which you have become accustomed at home, surely he makes up for that shortcoming by the peculiar deference which is indicated by his invariably speaking to you in the third person. To those who have learnt really to appreciate this form of speech, it constitutes a manifestation of profound respect; and the French, in their turn, are infinitely astonished to hear an English butler call his master "you." The suppression of "*vous*" and the sub-

stitution of "Monsieur" is not a very easy habit to acquire; but in no decent house in France would a servant of either sex be allowed to stay ten minutes, if he or she ventured to use the second person in speaking to master, mistress, or visitors. This form of speech is one of the temporary concessions of his personal dignity which the servant consents to make while he is in your house; but he must be a very good fellow indeed, and have retained very considerable regard for you, if he continues to do it for one instant after he has left your service. At that moment the servant vanishes; the man and the elector reappear; away goes "Monsieur," and back comes "you;" and most disagreeable it is to listen to.

So far we have been thinking only of general principles, and of the main forms in which they are manifested. So far it has been easy enough to lay down definitions and draw deductions. But when we begin to go into details and study individuals, we almost fancy at first that all our definitions and all our deductions are bottomless and valueless. We find such an incredible variety of types and sub-types, such countless shades of character, such an infinity of differing results from apparently similar causes, that we are almost tempted to exclaim that the developments of human nature amongst French ser-

vants follow no law whatever, and that it is nonsense to pretend to determine their origin or their object. But the mere fact that these developments exist at all, is in itself a proof that they are brought about by some action peculiar to France; for we see nothing in any way resembling them in England, where servants, like all other orders of society, are made on one remorseless pattern, from which no one is allowed to deviate one inch. The striking individuality of the French servant is simply another consequence of the equality of classes: he is not bound to copy a rigorous model—he is permitted to be himself; he profits by the permission, and so produces the bewildering contradictions which we observe in him. When this explanation is once admitted, it enables us to reconcile our preconceived theories with the varying facts which we successively discover; indeed it confirms and strengthens those theories, by showing how intense is the effect of the equality system, and how specially it favours the growth of idiosyncrasies which any other atmosphere would stifle. We find all the qualities and all the defects, many of them coexisting in the same person; and we see them all the more distinctly, because, as a rule, they are evident on the surface, for there is no repression sufficient to keep them down. The fact is, that French ser-

vants are natural human beings not made to rule, and that we detect their peculiarities with singular ease, for the double reason that they have not received education enough to voluntarily hide them, and that the observer who lives side by side with them all day has better opportunities of examining them than are offered to him by other classes with which he is in less intimate connection. Perhaps the strangest of the many odd peculiarities which come to light during an investigation of the nature of indoor servants across the Channel, is the facility with which most of them are able to suit themselves to the tone of the family in which they are for the moment placed. They seem to possess a special grace of adaptation, which doubtless is but an expansion of the imitative power which the entire nation possesses in so marked a degree. They fit themselves everywhere and to everybody; they get the measure of a new situation in a couple of days, and either give it up or take kindly to it according to their mental disposition; but if they do take it, they accept the rules of the house with thoroughness during working hours, however different they may be from those which they may have been following elsewhere. This is particularly true of Paris servants, who constitute a class by themselves, far less worthy but far more interesting than that

formed by the mass of steadier men and women who do the country work. In Paris the servants change their place with an ease which would be impossible if families would but join together to adopt the English system of "characters." So long as masters seeking servants are content with written certificates (which French law obliges you to give to a departing servant, and which contain no kind of real information), the present wretched system will go on flourishing, and thieves and drunkards will go on shifting from house to house, getting kicked out everywhere, but getting taken on somewhere else directly. On this point the whole organisation in Paris is totally rotten; and though it is generally possible to learn all about a candidate by asking him where he comes from, and going there to inquire, the trouble is rarely taken. In the provinces, on the contrary, servants have much difficulty in getting places, unless they can supply full and satisfactory information as to their antecedents. The natural result is, that whereas in the country you may find plenty of old servants, there are few such to be discovered inside the walls of Paris. The rule there is, that "servants change places as if they were gloves"; and though there are admirable exceptions, those exceptions only prove the rule. Country servants are content with the life of the house they live in;

the Paris servant, man or woman, frequently leads two separate lives, the second of which begins at night when work is over. The organisation of servants' bedrooms, which are always placed together on the top floor of the Paris houses, facilitates all sorts of illicit practices. The thirty servants, male and female, of the different tenants of a large house, are all packed on the sixth story in thirty numbered rooms; each has a key, and can either receive, by the *escalier de service*, all the visits which he or she may wish for, or may go out to visit other sixth floors. The liberty is absolute after bed-time; the master and the mistress can exercise no control, even if they cared to do so; and servants must be good indeed if they do not utilise the freedom which is thus flung at their feet. No sight in Paris more astonishes an Englishwoman than to be taken up to one of those huge attics, and to be led along the wandering corridors, past endless yellow doors, all exactly alike, and only distinguished by the number on them. It is a saddening spectacle; the place looks almost like a prison, but it is the very opposite; grooms and *femmes de chambre*, footmen and kitchen-maids, cooks and coachmen, English housemaids and sundry visitors, are turned loose there every night, to sleep, or to divert themselves as they may best please. This

is mournful and degrading, but habit seems to make the Parisians blind to it. If they are spoken to seriously on it, they say, "O yes, it really is very wrong, but it is the system; and what can we do to change it?" Of course this is not the case in private "hotels;" but it is the universal rule in houses let out in apartments, where the only servants who ever sleep downstairs in the apartment itself are the nurses who have charge of young children, or perhaps a maid who remains near her mistress in case she should be wanted during the night. With such liberty as this, it is wonderful that Paris servants should be so good as they are. There are scamps enough amongst them, but there are a great many excellent creatures too, and quantities of brave girls who stick to their religious duties, who get up in the early morning to go to mass, who walk to their beds down those foul corridors with their eyes straight before them, and their ears resolutely closed, like little saints whom no temptation can touch. Those are the people who counterbalance the cooks who rob you, and the valets who smash your glasses, and the coachmen who provide for their children by selling your oats. And amongst the men there are good fellows too; cheery, handy, honest, willing, and clean, ready and able to do everything: men who can prepare a dessert, flowers included, for a dinner of forty covers; can cook a

breakfast on an emergency; can varnish boots so as to shame the brightness of the sun; can darn your socks on a journey; can clean rooms better than a British housemaid; can nurse you when you are ill; and can often give you wise advice. With men of this class liberty does not constitute a danger; they do not abuse it: they are generally indifferent to it, because they have it—as pastry-cooks' girls and grocers' boys are indifferent to the tarts and sugar which surround them.

It seems probable that Paris servants can be taught by wise masters to respect their freedom, and to make an honest use of it; at least this opinion certainly results from an examination of the totally different effects produced in different houses. In some establishments the servants are always changing, and are always out at night; in others the self-same people stop for years, and go regularly to bed at ten o'clock. How can this seeming contradiction be explained otherwise than by the influence of the master, and by the degree of contentment which he instils into the mind of his man? "Le maître fait le valet." Singularly enough, the mistress does not always seem to exercise the same improving power over the women-servants, for when the latter have once got into the swing of bad habits it is almost impossible to cure them. This may or may not prove that when women have grown vicious they are more radically

so than men are; and, anyhow, that is outside our present subject: but it is a partial explanation of the fact that the class of servants which it is most difficult to keep is that of *femmes de chambre*. Men of all kinds usually hesitate a little before they give warning, for changing is a nuisance to them as well as to their masters; but Paris ladies'-maids shift about as easily as butterflies in a garden. And yet these very women, with all their capriciousness, do not pursue vanity or its satisfactions; they never wear their mistress's dresses, or set up for sham ladies, as do English women of their class. The spectacle which is so abundant at the West End of London on a Sunday afternoon, when the streets are filled with ridiculous creatures out for half a day, who imagine that they disguise their position in life by the flashy clothes they wear, but who simply make themselves thereby vulgar and contemptible, is unknown in Paris or in any part of France. The French maid is ceasing to wear caps in the street, and is adopting bonnets—that, unhappily, is true; but she dresses according to her station, respectably; and however we may deplore the gradual disappearance out of doors of the type of twenty years ago, we still find it inside the houses, where the white apron and the bright cap with its starched strings continue to exist in all their merit. The French maid goes in

for love, not vanity; but even love does not render her less thrifty. Like all other servants of her race, she lays by regularly. At two-and-twenty she has a small account at the savings bank; at thirty she possesses five railway debentures or a little *rente;* and if she does not marry, she has stored up, by the time she is an old woman, a few hundred pounds, and can go back to her village to end her days in peace. The men do just the same; the economising prudent spirit of the nation is almost as evident in them as in the miserly peasants who live on nothing but black bread and beans, but who have a stocking full of gold hidden away under a tile in the floor.

The general characteristics of French private servants may be said to be activity, cleanly aspect, cheery temper, simplicity, and economy; but, as has been already explained, they present the most varied types and forms, and it is useless to attempt to bring them all within the terms of any absolute description. It is true that the distinctions between the various provinces, which were real enough a quarter of a century ago, are fast disappearing under the levelling influence of railways. The external differences which may still be observed amongst servants, from Dunkerque to Bayonne, and thence to Nice, are now almost solely physical and linguistic. There are still discrepancies in

patois and in physiognomy, but all the rest has grown pretty much alike; we must go far into Brittany to discover even a relic of special costume. The equalisation of the wants of masters all over the country has outwardly brought about a corresponding equalisation in the appearance and in the knowledge and capacity of the servants who minister to these wants; the spread of education and the constantly-growing facilities of communication will still further develop this tendency, and local peculiarities will soon have entirely disappeared. There will still, however, remain the radical distinction which exists between the town and country servant; and however much the influences now at work may unify the aspect of the nation, they will probably never destroy the individuality of each member of it. For these two reasons it is unlikely that it will ever be possible to write a complete monography of French servants; the subject is too large, too infinitely varied, and too irregularly shaded, for any observer to be able to seize it in all its parts. All he can do is to look at it as a whole, and to note the particular details which may happen to come before his eye: no experience, however large, will enable him to effect more. And as, unfortunately, the exaggerations of the subject are far more evident than its finer and more hidden elements, he will be unconsciously led to describe

exceptions (all exaggerations are exceptions), instead of limiting himself to the far more difficult task of delineating the minute differences which compose the average whole. This is particularly true of Parisian servants, whose eccentricities are more conspicuous than their virtues, and whose defects are more striking than their merits. It is rare enough to hear a Parisian say that his servant is a good fellow; on the contrary, he is generally ready to tell all sorts of malicious stories against him. This is not only ingratitude but folly. It is explicable, however, by the unceasing disposition of the French to discover something to laugh at, though it be on matters of keen interest to themselves. It is true that servants, particularly men, do often act in a way which is curious, even in the land of equality, fraternity, and free opinions, and that the temptation to publish their sayings and doings is sometimes irresistible. We may as well yield to it here and give a few examples.

A rich tradesman, who lived in a great house, and spent tons of money, was concluding, before the siege, a negotiation with a servant who had just left the Duc de la Rochefoucauld - Bisaccia. Everything was agreed on, and the master was on the point of saying, "Very well, then, come on Monday," when the man interrupted him with this communication: "There is one thing that I must

observe to Monsieur;—having lived with Monsieur le Duc, I am accustomed to high society; and though I have now consented to take the direction of the house of Monsieur, I must warn Monsieur that I can announce no visitor without a title; consequently, Monsieur will have the goodness to understand that I shall usher in everybody as a Count or a Marquis, even though it be the boot-maker or the father-in-law of Monsieur."

Another man, who had been for some months in his place, came to his master one morning and informed him that "the difference of political opinions which existed between them rendered it impossible for him to continue his service."

A third had a mania for directing all the acts of his mistress. If she were going to give a ball he would come privately to her and say, "Madame would do well not to give that ball; Madame is not rich, and Madame knows that balls are very expensive, and that she may ruin herself." If, on the contrary, she were going to a ball elsewhere, the argument would be: "Is it prudent for Madame to go to a ball? Madame is not accustomed to wear low dresses: Madame might catch a cold, and the cold might become bronchitis; and Madame might die, to the grief of everybody, for everybody loves Madame." Another time Madame will say to him, "Who rang the door-bell just now?"

He answers, "It was Madame's mother, who had something extremely pressing to say to Madame; but as I was sure it would tire Madame, I told Madame's mother that Madame was not at home."

A cook comes for orders for the dinner, and is told to provide, amongst other things, a leg of mutton. She replies, "A leg of mutton! Madame appears to entirely forget that Pierre" (the footman) "does not at all like mutton."

Such impudence as these examples indicate, is, however, singularly rare. The respect which they have for themselves generally induces French servants to respect their masters; and a thousand absurd stories, however historically true they may be, would not affect the general fact that courtesy, not impertinence, is the distinctive sign of the class which we are examining. Sobriety is another of its real qualities, not only in drinking, but in eating also. Intoxication has never been a Gallic vice. It appeared temporarily in Paris during the siege and the Commune; but since the peace, all public symptoms of it have vanished. Servants scarcely ever drink, and they mainly feed on dishes which would be thrown into the dust-hole by the occupants of an English kitchen. White haricots and lentils, vegetable soups, and the most elementary forms of beef and mutton, may be very nourishing, but they are scarcely

tempting. The argument that such articles are cheap, and that servants ought not to be so expensively fed as their masters are, would scarcely go down in a British servants'-hall; but it is admitted and applied all over France, where the economy of the kitchen is partly based on the simplicity of the servants' dinners, and where, as a rule, there is no complaining on the subject.

Adaptability is another great merit of both men and women. They are able and willing to do each other's work: none of them would ever dream of saying, "It's not my place to do it." If there be any reason for it, a cook will clean the drawing-room, a footman will cook the dinner, a lady's maid will black the boots, without any growling, and rather as fun than otherwise. English servants seem to entertain a sort of contempt for each other's functions, and to look upon any momentary exchange of them as being degrading to their dignity. They contemn the notion of learning anything they don't know, particularly cookery; altogether forgetting that, if they marry, they will have to prepare their own food, and that it might be useful to learn a little about it beforehand. The French, on the contrary, are so versatile, so imitative, so eager to pick up scraps of knowledge, that they are always ready to try their hand at a new occupation. A good man-servant always

knows a little of carpentry and upholstery, can mend a broken lock, can sew, can fry and stew, can bottle wine, and make beds, and dust rooms, as if he had been born for nothing else. The women—most of them, at least—can do all the sorts of women's work, have some idea of doctoring and nursing, and of the use of medicines, can wash and iron, and wait at table. Never was the notion of being "generally useful" more clearly understood or more gaily practised than by the better part of the Paris servants, and by country servants almost without exception. And when your household is an old one; when you have had the luck to get together a group who do not quarrel; when the duration of service in your house begins to count by years; when the heart has grown interested on both sides,—then you find out what French servants are capable of being. Then, when sorrow comes, when sickness and death are inside your walls—then you get the measure of the devotion which equality alone can produce. Then come long nights spent together watching by feverish bedsides, in mutual anguish and with mutual care; then come tears that are shed together over the common loss, and hands that wring yours with the earnestness of true affection; and afterwards, when you are calm enough to think, you recognise that those servants are indeed your

friends. Such cases are unfrequent in Paris, though even there they are sometimes found; but in the country they are ordinary enough.

One more distinctive feature of the French servant is that you are his master; he is not yours. The understanding on which he comes to you is, that though he is your equal, he suspends all pretension to practical equality while he is in your service. The fact that he can put an end to this suspension when he likes, encourages him to support it while it lasts. The English servant is always struggling to maintain his imaginary dignity by sticking out for the infinitely small privileges which by degrees, and under the pressure of necessity, have been conferred upon him. The Frenchman, feeling that his rights as a man are absolutely on a par with those of his master, attaches vastly less importance to his rights as a servant, and is consequently ready to do whatever you ask, provided only you ask in a way which pleases him. The result is, that though servants are considered in France quite as much as they are in England, the consideration takes a different form. In England, few mistresses would venture to disturb their servant at his dinner: in France, he is unceremoniously sent out, if necessary, on an errand of two hours between his soup and his meat, and the man goes cheerily and without a growl.

He does this because he knows that, if he falls ill, his mistress will tend him with her own hands; that her children will come and read to him; that he will receive the signs of sympathy which indicate mutual regard. Of course none of these descriptions have any universal application; France contains plenty of bad masters, and plenty of bad servants: but what is absolutely true is, that, as a rule, the French servant is capable not only of rendering the highest class of service in all its details, and in the most varied forms, but also of rendering that service with a natural simplicity and matter-of-course interest which doubles its value. His conduct depends partly on his own temper, but still more on the attitude of his master towards him. The secret lies in the way he is handled. He is susceptible of a vast deal of education; he may be developed to a high standard of ability in his trade, and to sincere devotion to his master. If he becomes a scamp, it is ordinarily because he has been entirely neglected by the people he serves. It may, however, be said to the honour of many French families, that their system of action at home is to try to make the very best of the material at their disposal. They recognise that the science of indoor life is worthy of close study and pursuit; that it is, like married happiness, an object which needs tender nursing and constant

watchfulness; that there is no error greater than to suppose that it will necessarily go on by itself like a clock that is wound up; that to maintain it in its best form it is essential to keep it incessantly in view, and to modify its treatment as its conditions change. This is the true philosophy of home life; this is an act in which the French excel, and in which they are singularly aided by the supple plasticity of their servants.

Beyond the general definitions which have already been expressed here, no *résumé* of the subject can be safely attempted; indeed, it may be that, in seeking to approach precision, these definitions have been made too absolute. Still, though inapplicable as a law, they are certainly fairly exact, and they correctly express general tendencies even if they do not correctly express universal facts. Nothing more can be attempted; the matter is too diffuse, and its elements are too infinitely varied.

And now that we have looked roughly through the nature and the conduct of French servants—now that we have recognised their situation in society and their relations towards their masters—let us come back to our starting-point, and ask ourselves what lesson we can learn, what teaching we can apply, from the experience we have gained. If we are honest, we shall surely recognise that the

position of servants is morally higher in France than it is in England, that no abandonment of dignity is required from them, that mutual respect is the general basis of the connection between them and their employers. We shall further acknowledge that the Frenchman, from his sobriety, his gay temper, his willingness, and his usually extensive capabilities, is, on the whole, a pleasanter and more useful servitor than the average of Englishmen. It can scarcely be said that all these differences spring solely from peculiarities of national temperament, and that the Frenchman is what he is solely because he is a Frenchman. That, of course, supplies a partial explanation of the question; but there are other far more potent causes at work. If it were possible to sum up those causes in one word, we should have no alternative but to say that the principal defects of English servants, and the grave difficulties which their exigencies have created during the last thirty years, are due to the vanity of their masters. Surrounded on all sides by the aspirations and the growing discontent of the lower classes, the English persist in regulating their servants by rules of pride. They treat them overbearingly; they keep them at an unnecessary distance; they remind them many times a-day that they are absolute inferiors. The natural result is, that the English servant gives what he is

bound to give, but no more; he offers nothing of his own accord, for he has engaged his body, not his heart. He lives in a state of permanent secret resentment. He does not rebel, because the moment has not come for that; but if ever he should get a chance hereafter, he will fix his own conditions, which, apparently, will be very different from those under which he now exists. The master is not more satisfied than the man, but he makes no attempt to change the odious double tyranny which each exercises towards the other. Pride, the curse of modern England, prompts them both. Neither of them has yet conceived that he would be happier if he were natural—if he ceased to indignantly stand up for little rights and little privileges, which, regarded either morally or philosophically, are simply contemptible. In France, where all rights are supposed to be equal, no one has rights to defend; and though that solution of the difficulty is inapplicable publicly in England—in our time at least—surely it would not be impossible to try it privately in a few houses, with chosen servants, in order to see whether English natures cannot be moulded in the French model. It can scarcely be seriously urged that an English servant cannot be cured of his special vanity—that he cannot be raised, by example and with teaching, above the sham dignity he affects—that he cannot

be induced to regard service as a state of life implying a general obligation to aid whenever aid is wanted, and not as a duty strictly limited to laying the cloth and drawing corks in one case, or to pure housemaiding in another. An English "general servant," like the maid-of-all-work, is incapable of doing any one thing well; it may therefore perhaps be argued that if a butler or a lady's-maid were to sometimes discharge other functions than their own, they would cease to do their own work well. But really it would be degrading to England to admit such a reply as that. Why should not an Englishman do anything as well as a Frenchman? The answer, in this special case, is, Because he won't. But if he were encouraged to try, by kind words and convincing reasons, and rewarded in the event of success, is it certain that he would persist in his refusal? If English masters could attain sufficient wisdom—could sufficiently shake off the bonds of conventional pride in which they have been brought up—to call their servants together and discuss the whole thing with them calmly and without prejudice,—who can pretend that the system might not be modified, without a shock, to the infinite advantage of all concerned? Try it. Say to your household, "My friends, in France masters and servants do not regard each other as enemies, and do not each stand out for every inch

of what we call 'rights.' They give and take. The servant looks upon his master as a friend, and does all he can to be of use to him without haggling over the conditions of his 'place.' The master treats his servants kindly, and chats and laughs with them; and it really appears that they get on over there vastly better than we do—that the work is better done, that housekeeping is less expensive, all because everybody has the same end in view—that end being mutual satisfaction. Now, my friends, let us see if we can imitate the French. I shall begin, for it is my duty to set the example, and to show you how to vanquish old habits and old prejudices." What do you suppose your servants would say and do? They might be a little puzzled at first, but if you acted with tact and sense, you would soon guide them to the right road, weeding out the incorrigibles whom you might discover to be unworthy of your guidance.

If such an end as this were attained even in half-a-dozen houses, this glimpse at French servants will have served a useful object.

CHAPTER II.

CHILDREN.

THE present average duration of life in France is about thirty-eight years; the population amounts to thirty-eight millions;* if we take fifteen as the age where childhood ends, there would thus appear to be about fifteen millions of children in France. This way of calculating is, of course, inexact, but it suffices to give an approximate idea on the subject; and, in the absence of any specific information in the census returns, it is, perhaps, the only one which can be applied.

Fifteen millions of children imply fifteen millions of different characters. Education, example, and habit may level the infinitely-varied dispositions with which we come into the world, but until they have done so it cannot be said that any two of us are alike. Under the influence of our "bringing up" we tend towards approximate uniformity, externally, at least; we learn, with years, to control our tempers, to guide our tongues, to subdue our

* This was the figure before the war.

caprices. But children are more natural: we see them as they are—the mass of them, that is; so long as they have not been led under the common yoke by common teaching, they exhibit a variety of humours and fancies which we cease to find in their well-schooled elders. It is therefore impossible to lay down any general national type of character for children, especially as, in most cases, their habits of thought, their manners and their prejudices, are susceptible of entire modification if they are removed during childhood from one centre to another. It has been proved, by several examples, that a boy of six, if he be transported to another land, may forget in three years his native language and almost his father's name; and though such cases are excessive and exceptional, they prove, at all events, that with such plastic elements as children's minds, original tendencies may be totally effaced, and that the form of their development is but an accident depending mainly on the circumstances which surround them. Of course this in no way means that the real basis of character can be remodelled by outward leverage; all that is intended to be urged is, that the parts of young natures which depend for their formation and consolidation on local and personal influences are liable to change with those influences, so long as time has not stamped them definitely and indelibly. And

if this be true as a general principle; if the innumerable shades and tints of temperament which we observe in yet untrained minds are met with in every land; if, diversified as they are by nature, these minds are susceptible of endless other changes from the effect of the new contacts to which they may be successively exposed,—it follows that in a country so large as France, composed of so many different provinces, containing populations of varied origin and habits, we shall remark, even more than elsewhere, the endlessly-shifting phases of child-nature. But though France exhibits even less uniformity in the matter than is discoverable in other countries, it shows no excessive contradictions; and though the fifteen millions of little people that we are talking of possess fifteen millions of different little heads and hearts, the contrasts between them are, after all, not so vast as to prevent us from grouping them into a few main types.

At first sight it may seem needless, and indeed almost absurd, to say that the main distinction to establish between French children is to divide them into boys and girls; the difference of sex is, however, accompanied in France by such singular and such marked differences of character and natural tendencies, that it is difficult to lay too much stress on it; it is the essential basis of the subject. The French do not see it, at least it does not strike

them with anything like the force with which it presents itself to foreign observers; they are therefore particularly surprised to be told that the radical demarcation which exists between their men and women asserts itself from the cradle, and that the special masculine and feminine peculiarities of their national temper are distinctly visible in their children. Excepting the United States, no country exhibits a divergence of ideas and objects between the sexes such as we recognise in France. Other nations show us a tolerable unity of ends and means between men and women; we find elsewhere approximately identical hopes and principles and springs of action. In America and in France we discover, on the contrary, that though husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, may live together in admirable harmony, they differ profoundly in their views of life and its duties, and in the systems which they employ to attain the form and degree of contentment which their individual needs may crave for. It is not going too far to say—though the question must be approached with prudence, in order to avoid exaggeration—that the salient dispositions of the French man and the French woman drift in opposite directions. The sexes are held together by a common bond of interest and affection, but their tendencies are not the same; they live, as a whole, in a chronic con-

dition of discord on many of the main theories, obligations, and even pleasures of existence. The women stand, incontestably, far above the men. We need not look long or far for a proof of this assertion: the attitude of the two sexes during the late war, and especially inside besieged Paris, supplies it with sufficient force. Of course all these observations are only general—there are plentiful exceptions; but it cannot be denied that the higher moral qualities—resolute attachment to duty, self-sacrificing devotion, unyielding maintenance of principle, and religious faith, which is the key to all the rest—are abundant amongst French women, and are relatively rare amongst French men. It is pleasanter to state the question in this negative form, to indicate the qualities which the men have not, than to define it positively and to determine the defects which they have; and it is scarcely necessary, for the purpose which we are pursuing, to be more precise in the comparison between grown-up people. Our inquiry is limited to children; and, provided we clearly recognise the main outlines of the distinctions which exist between their parents, that will suffice to enable us to verify the statement that those same distinctions are visible, of course in less vivid colours, amongst the little ones.

Every one will assent to the proposition that the

most marked feature of the character of the French is the development of their emotional and sensational faculties. This development exists in both sexes, but is far more evident amongst the women than amongst the men; it acquires force with education, and is most glaringly conspicuous in the highest classes. Repression of manifestations of feeling forms no part of French teaching; on the contrary, those manifestations are regarded as natural and desirable. We therefore find that French mothers rather encourage their children, and especially their daughters, never to conceal the impressions which may agitate them, providing always that those impressions are honest and real, and are not of a nature to shock either *convenances* or principles. It follows that the impulses of children remain unchecked, that they rush into light directly they are felt, and that the influence of mothers and of governesses is employed to guide such impulses to a faithful and graceful form of expression far more than to suppress or even control them in themselves. There is a vast deal to be said in favour of this system. It stimulates individuality, it fortifies the affections, it develops sensibility in many of its varied forms. It has been applied for generations, and it has produced an hereditarily-acquired capacity of sentiment which, at this present time, is certainly greater

than that possessed by any other nation. The range of this capacity is most extensive. It applies to almost every position and almost every accident of life, to art, and even to science; but its full effects, its full consequences, are naturally observed in the tenderer sympathies, in the emotions, and in the gentler duties which fall particularly on women. There is, in most Frenchwomen, a gushingness, an unrestrained outpouring of inner self, which is reproduced in their daughters as abundantly as in themselves. Girls, from their very babyhood, live side by side with demonstrative mothers, who show and say what they think and feel with a natural frankness of which they are scarcely conscious. The children not only inherit this disposition, but are aided to develop it in their own little hearts by example, contact, and advice. They are born impulsive. They are shown how to be so. They are told that, provided impulse be well expressed, and be directed to worthy objects, it is a source of joy, of tenderness, and of charm. The English theory is very contrary to this; but such matters are questions of race and of national habit. And furthermore, if we are honest, we shall own that keen susceptibility of emotion is infinitely attractive in a true woman. Young French girls have it to an astonishing extent, particularly in the upper ranks. Their heads and hearts live in the

open air; their natures are all outside. They have no place where they can hide away a thought from their mother's sight; it must come out. It is easy to understand, even at a distance, how this simplifies the guidance of a child. Its merits and its defects come right into its mother's hand. She has not got to hunt for them, and to doubt whether she sees the truth; it glares at her in the hundred little acts and words of her expansive girl. The French child wears no mask.

And the direct action of the mother becomes all the stronger from the almost universal custom of keeping her children with her day and night. Many a girl in France has never slept outside her mother's chamber until she leaves it to be married; and, at the worst, she is no farther off than the next room, with the door open between. Such unceasing neighbourhood brings about an action which may be not only intellectual and moral, but possibly physical and magnetic too. The mother passes into the daughter, the daughter absorbs the mother—their essences get mixed; and hence it is that Frenchwomen exercise such singular power over their girls, and that the girls so generally become an exact reproduction of the mother under whose constant eye they have grown to womanhood. Between the transparent frankness of the child's nature and the indefatigable proximity of the

parent, we get the explanation of the regular transmission of those types of character which seem to remain unvaried in so many French families of the upper class, and which may almost be said to belong to them as their names do. The same qualities and the same defects are reproduced amongst the old nobility from generation to generation. When a wife comes in from another origin, she may try perhaps to introduce new elements; but they get effaced, or at all events weakened, by the old traditions with which they have to contend; so that the main features of the house continue to be recognisable: the child appropriates them, and hands them on again when she, in her turn, becomes a mother. This is, however, true only of the highest classes, where pride of race, and the supposed obligation to maintain preconceived notions, still exist with wonderful vigour. In the middle and lower stages of society no such religion can be found. There, the operation of modern levelling is seen in its fullest force; there, no ancestral theories compete with nineteenth-century tendencies; there, the modern woman and her modern child are fashioned as the modern man requires, but always, though in varying degrees, with emotional hearts and unchecked sympathies.

The general result is, that wherever we look

throughout France, in chateaux and in cottages, in the "hotels" of Paris, and in workmen's lodgings, we see the girl-children echoing their mothers, sometimes with absolute exactness, sometimes with merely approximate resemblance, but always with a sort of outbursting natural truth which is singularly winning, and which inspires very thorough confidence in the honesty of their hearts. Such a beginning indicates pretty clearly that the girls will grow into women capable of feeling in most of its ardent shapes; and though the tone of the society into which they may be thrown may deviate them from their first track, and may make them worthless instead of worthy, they will none the less retain their early readiness of sensation, and their faculty of expressing it. If we look out of Paris, if we take the mass of the country population, we recognise that a very small minority of the girls grow up to abandon their first teaching; we see how difficult it is to eradicate the stamp which the mother puts upon her child; and we own that these Frenchwomen, according to their lights, know how to do their duty to their young. Europe, perhaps, does not believe one word of this; Europe measures France by the little that it sees of it, by a few hundred Parisiennes who stand forward in flagrant radiance, and who damage their country in the eyes of the entire world for

the satisfaction of their own vanity. Those women are not France; those women's children are not real French children. The poor little creatures who are sent dressed up to the Tuileries Gardens to play in public their mothers' parts are what travellers look at, and what they, not unnaturally, imagine to be the normal type; but the error is as great as to take coarse novels as the expression of national literature. Furthermore, it should be remembered that for the last thirty years Paris has become the home of a large number of foreigners with money; and that a good many of the girls who make a moralist mourn when he looks at them in the Champs Elysées do not belong to France at all. The nation has faults enough, in all conscience; but it is not fair either to attribute to it what it does not deserve, or to ascribe to the entire people the sins of a special few. If there be one undoubted, indisputable merit of a Frenchwoman, it is her devotion to her girls, and her resolute effort to keep them pure. The remarkable young person of ten that an Englishman contemplates with stupefaction under the chestnut-trees round the obelisk, and in whom he observes a variety of precocious defects, is no more a sample of real French children than a peacock is an ordinary specimen of birds, or the 'Vie Parisienne' an example of everyday newspapers. She is a product

of the period, an accident of the epoch; she is not the representative of her country. She may or may not be as impudent as Gavroche, as dictatorial as Napoleon, and as bumptious as Louis XIV.—that depends on her temperament and her mamma; but, whatever be the degree of her premature fastness, she is but a member of a little tainted flock—she is not France. We find real France elsewhere.

The other extreme exists, as it does all the world over. It includes the offspring of the terrifically strict people, of the intensely rigid mothers who tie up their girls in a preserve of ruthless piety, out of which the poor little things would fly away if they could. If there be any position in which a French child hides her real thoughts, it is in a few of those appalling houses where devotion attains the height of cruelty. Happily there are not many of them; but there are enough, particularly in country towns, to show us examples of saddened children who are taken to church four times each day, and who are forbidden to play because play distracts from prayer. This sort of teaching defeats its own end; reaction comes with liberty; and in cases of this class it is not unfrequent to see the whole impress of the mother's efforts fade, instead of assuming a durable and lasting form, as is the rule in France.

Between these two exceptions — between the pert, pretentious, half-vicious little damsel that Paris often shows us, and the cheerless, over-prayer-booked, laughter-dreading victims at the other end of the scale—lie the real girls of France. Naturally we find in them all the shades of character which lie between the limits of utter worldliness and total piety; and we shall recognise that, however true it be that the parent's influence is extraordinarily powerful in France, it in no way suffices even to unify the natures of children of the same mother, still less to reduce to any general type the fifteen millions of temperaments before us. The persistence of individuality in the child is especially remarkable, when we take into account the fact that most French children live entirely with their families; that they not only, as has been already said, sleep in their mother's room, but that they pass the day with her, take all their meals with her, are not sent into a nursery (there are no nurseries in France), are not left to the care of servants, and that they participate almost completely in the life of the grown-up people round them. The consequence is that the French girl leads pretty much the same existence as her mother: she does not pay visits with her, or go to balls or theatres, but, indoors, she scarcely leaves her mother's side, she thinks and feels with her, she chatters with her

visitors, she is in permanent contact with men and women, and is not limited to society of her own age. Yet she remains herself: her personality is not effaced by what she sees and hears. This maintenance of self makes French children very attractive to study; one is sure to find peculiarities in each of them, and those peculiarities come out and show themselves without reserve or hindrance, pushed forward as they are by impulsiveness. If, however, they involved radical differences, it would be impossible to attempt any classification of character: they do not go so far as that; they only indicate shades and tints, and in no way imply fundamental distinctions.

We may therefore, without stopping at the sub-varieties, roughly divide the girls of France pretty much as girls are divided all the world over: there are the religious and the irreligious, the intelligent and the stupid, the affected and the natural, the self-sacrificing and the selfish. In indicating these main categories, it must at once be added that the majority of the children, like the majority of the women, belong to the four good classes. There are more religious, intelligent, natural, unselfish children than the contrary. Prejudice is no guide to truth; and though there are a good many foreign lookers-on who are quite convinced that most French women are selfish coquettes, living mainly

to amuse themselves and to satisfy their vanity, that impression is altogether false. There are such women in what seems to be abundance, particularly in Paris; but in reality they constitute a feeble minority, and they only appear to be numerous because the very nature of their defects leads them to publicly expose those defects. They need excitement and admiration, and they ask for both. The few foreigners who really go into French society see specimens of such women at dinners and at balls, hear the noise they make, scarcely notice their quieter companions, and carry away the notion that everybody is alike. This is an enormous error. For one woman who goes to balls, there are, in all France, fifty who stop at home, out of sight and out of reach. Those are the women who constitute the nation—those are the women who rear French girls: it is upon them that opinion should be based, and not upon the exceptional Parisienne, who is so generally accepted as the type of France. It is, nevertheless, incontestable that this latter model has become somewhat multiplied during the last twenty years, and that recent habits of extravagance and luxury have sorely damaged the part of the rising generation which has been exposed to them; but here, again, the truth is that the number of rowdy women who grew into existence under the Empire was, relatively, very limited, and

that their influence has been far less extensive than is supposed outside France. An infinitely large proportion of the educated population shrank from the contact of that new product—the fast woman: the evil consequences of her apparition will therefore be limited to her own offspring, and will not be transmitted to the children of others. Furthermore, a reaction against her has seriously set in since the war, and she herself is probably condemned to disappear; if so, her action on her girls may perhaps be counteracted by the new atmosphere which those girls will breathe when they become women. At the worst, we may be sure that she will recruit no new followers now, and that the evil she has already done will extend no further.

After all, it is but natural that the mass of European women should be good. Their tendency, without distinction of nationality, is towards duty, faith, and gentleness. The French are only like the others, excepting that the manifestation of their feelings, good or bad, assumes a more demonstrative form. Their girls follow the same rule; and, notwithstanding the infinite variety of their individual peculiarities, they present, as a whole, the same natural dispositions towards virtue and simplicity. But where French home life puts on sometimes a character of its own, which distinguishes it from that of most other countries, and especially from

England, is in the astonishing power which certain children exercise over their parents—a power almost as great as that which the parents themselves ought to possess over their children. In certain exaggerated cases, which, indeed, are by no means rare, the child is her mother's mistress; she becomes a tyrant, and enforces her will with a pitiless vigour before which the mother quails. The reason is, that the art of spoiling reaches a development in France which is unknown elsewhere, and that maternal affection not unfrequently descends to folly and imbecility. When this occurs, there is an end of all control and guidance on the mother's side, and of all obedience in the child. If good qualities persist in a young heart under such conditions, they must indeed be firmly rooted. In what other country than France would a mother permit her child to get upon the table, in the presence of two strangers, and to blow the lamp and candles out in the middle of dinner? And where else would such a history as the following be possible? At a dinner-party of twenty people, two guests, man and wife, did not appear at the appointed hour. After wondering and waiting, the mistress of the house commenced her banquet. At ten o'clock in walked the absentees, looking somewhat foolish, but candidly confessing the motive of their absence as if it were quite natural. Their child, a girl of three,

had been put to bed just as they were starting for the dinner; but when they went to fondly wish it good-night, the child said, "Mamma, I won't let you go out." The mother argued, but in vain. The child would not give way. The father came and tried his eloquence, with no better success. Then the small creature, seeing her advantage, increased her demands: not only did she insist that neither father nor mother should leave the house, but called upon them to immediately undress and go to bed. They faintly resisted: the baby grew imperious, and threatened to cry forthwith. That beat them, as the mother deprecatingly observed to her astounded listeners. "Of course when the sweet child told us she was going to cry we were forced to yield; it would have been monstrous to cause her pain simply for our pleasure; so I begged Henri to cease his efforts to persuade her, and we both took off our clothes and went to bed. As soon as she was asleep we got up again, re-dressed, and here we are, with a thousand apologies for being so late."

These two examples are literally true, and there may be others of equal force. They show that excess of parental adoration may produce idiotcy; but it is scarcely necessary to say that they are grotesque exceptions. They are worth mentioning as illustrating a curious French form of madness;

but they are valueless as proofs of a condition of society. The reality is the other way. French girls, as a whole, are singularly docile; most of them obey for the best of all possible reasons—because they love. They live in such unceasing intimacy with their father and mother, that the tie between them indisputably grows stronger than in other lands where there is less constant community of heart and thought. In evidence of this, it is sufficient to point out the numerous examples which are to be found in France of three generations lodging together—the old people, their children, and their grandchildren, all united and harmonious. The fact is—and it is a fact, however prodigious it may appear to people who have always believed the contrary—that the family bond is extraordinarily powerful in France. What we call "united families" are the rule there, and the unity goes far beyond our usual interpretation of the word. It means not only affection and mutual devotion, but it affects the instincts of the nation to such a point that colonising, and even, to a certain degree, foreign travel, are, in many cases, rendered impossible by it. Neither sons nor daughters will consent to leave their parents; the shortest absence is regarded as a calamity. The population, as a whole, shrinks from expatriation, not because it is unfit to create new positions for itself (on the

contrary, its adaptability is notorious), but because it cannot face a rupture of habits and attachments which date from childhood. With such feelings inculcated in them from their babyhood, it is but natural that most French girls should do exactly they are told. They acquire mastery over their parents only in cases where their mothers are weak enough to let them do it. In almost every instance they occupy a position in the home life of France which is far beyond that accorded to children in other lands; but, putting aside the exceptional examples, they do not abuse the power which their position gives them; they remain natural, tender, and emotional—they do not revolt or seek to usurp command.

The advantages of the system of bringing up girls in constant contact with their mothers are numerous and real. They may perhaps acquire somewhat less mere book-knowledge than if they were sent to school, but they pick up what is generally more useful to them in after-life,—the faculty of conversation, habit of their own language, manners, tact, and even experience of human nature. The French girl learns how to be a woman from her very cradle, and this must certainly be admitted to offer a large compensation for want of discipline and of the habit of application. Children who grow in schools and convents may acquire more passive

obedience, more knowledge of history and of literature; but when they enter life they are less well prepared for it than other girls who have already studied its phases for twenty years at home. This, however, is general, not absolute. After all, no principles apply to every case, especially when the varieties of human nature have to be taken into account. There are plenty of girls brought up at home who in no way profit by the advantages at their disposal; there are many others who, fresh from school, instantly take their places as wives and mothers, and take it well. The rule is in favour of the former; but the exceptions amongst the latter are abundant enough to entitle them to serious notice. Those exceptions are the result of personal aptitudes, suddenly fortified by new influences, and developed by the imitative capacities so universal amongst the French. Still, the child who has never left her mother is, theoretically, the fitter of the two to immediately discharge her duties and fill her place in life. She has kept the house, ordered dinner, and probably cooked sometimes herself; she is accustomed to receive her mother's visitors; she can talk and curtsey (two tests of a real woman of the world); her proclivities towards art, if she has any, have been nursed and strengthened by example and advice; she has had full opportunity to acquire taste and charm, and to learn how to employ both;

and with all these earthly merits, she has probably lost nothing of the more solid virtues which were taught her as a child. She, like all the others, has passed through that grave moment of her existence, her First Communion, and she must be bad indeed if its impress does not rest on her. Who can look on at that touching sight and not feel that the performers in it are making an epoch in their lives? From it dates, in many a girl, the formation of her character, the consolidation of her faith, the frank acceptance of her duties and her pains. It goes home to every heart; its memory rests; old women talk of it as "le grand jour de ma vie." The night before it the child kneels down and asks her father and her mother to pardon all her faults; then she goes gravely through the house and begs the same forgiveness from all its other inmates. When the morning comes, she goes, in white all over, shrouded in a long muslin veil, to join her comrades at the church: they, like herself, have been preparing themselves by two years of special instruction at the public Catechism for the great day which has come at last. Then amidst the roll of music and all the pomp of ceremony, two columns of young children march slowly down the aisle and kneel, right and left, boys on one side, girls on the other, until they have filled the nave. The church seems to be half choked with snow as the white sea of

veils spreads over it. And when the great moment is reached at last and the children advance slowly to the altar, there is not a dry eye around. Fathers, mothers, watch eagerly for their own; and afterwards, if death should take them while still young, that is the instant of their lives which is most tenderly and most tearfully remembered. If the spectacle can unnerve men and make women sob, what must be its effect on the child herself? Putting the moral influence aside, what must be the other work wrought out in little hearts by so tremendous a sensation? The mere intensity of prayer, at such a moment, provokes new ardent feelings; a vista of joy and love, and of resolute good intentions, opens out. If there be purity and adoration on earth, if ever human nature faintly grows like angel nature, it must be at a First Communion.

But while the whole system of girl education in France tends to the development of the more feminine faculties, while it excites the emotional side of nature and of duty, while it stimulates charm, while it brightens family life by the position which it assigns to girls and by the fitness which it rouses in them for that position, it may be asked if it is not accompanied by the inconveniences and disadvantages of eager imaginations and aspirations, by the indolence which sentiment so often provokes, by unfitness for the practical work of everyday?

The answer may, in all truth, be negative. As a rule, Frenchwomen are sensational, but not sentimental—excitable, but good-tempered, active, and laborious. Their defects lie rather in want of order; in that contempt for new experience which so often results from strong early prejudices; in the need for excitement, or, more exactly, for distraction. These dispositions may often be detected in the children. Most of them are disorderly; they throw their toys and books about; fling their dresses on the floor where they take them off; leave the doors open behind them wherever they pass; lie in bed late in the morning; and seem unable to form the habit of doing the same thing at the same hour every day. In schools these faults are of course corrected, but in after-life they spring up again; and, with rare exceptions, all Frenchwomen, whether brought up in convents or at home, are somewhat dishevelled in their indoor habits. A certain quantity of disorder appears to be a necessity of their nature. Indeed, a good many of the better sort of them argue against too much regularity, as being a sign of a cold heart and of a soul incapable of feeling art. There is some reason in this view of the case, but its influence on the education of young children is necessarily bad; for though it may be wise, when we have grown old enough to judge, not to attach too much importance

to strict precision in all our daily acts, it is evident that girls, so long as they are girls, ought to be taught that regularity and order are necessary virtues about which they have almost as little choice as between truth and lies. The child hesitates because she sees her mother do so; she imitates, consciously or unconsciously, in this as in nearly everything else. In the one point of seeking for distraction the child does not imitate; she does not need excitement yet, and therefore does not comprehend that it has to be pursued. Her lessons and her doll suffice, and they suffice till she is almost a woman; for it should be observed that French girls generally remain children very late. They seem to be exposed to hothouse training, and to be forced on to premature young-ladyhood; but that view of them is an illusion. In no country do girls continue young so long; and that result becomes quite comprehensible when we reflect that though the child is frequently with grown-up people, and so acquires an ease of manner above her age, she is always with a fondling mother, who treats her as a baby, because in her eyes she always is so. The mother's influence being stronger than that of strangers, the child remains a child until necessity obliges her to become a woman.

The average result of girl-making in France is to produce a somewhat ignorant, very prejudiced,

charming young woman, susceptible of strong emotion and strong love, curious to see for herself what life is, eager to please and to win admiration and affection, but controlled, in nine cases out of ten, by deeply-rooted religious faith and a profound conviction of duty. If we admit that the great function of women is to create joy around us, to gild our lives, and to teach their girls to do the same, we ought to recognise that the French system attains its end. But if we insist that a mother has a nobler task than that—if we assert that her highest duty is to make her son a man —then we shall be forced to own that French mothers do not achieve their task.

Let us turn to the boys.

Wholesale definitions are not applicable to character. Description of human nature needs so many reservations, such careful colouring, so much and such varied shading, that it is impossible to bring it into a sentence or a word. It would therefore be, in principle, absurd as well as unjust to say that all French boys are sneaks; but so many of them are so, in the purest meaning of that abominable designation, that the most ardent friends of France are reluctantly compelled to acknowledge the fact, and to own that the mass of the youngsters across the Channel come out frightfully badly when they are judged by our notions of what boys ought

to be. Their meanness of nature is perhaps in part inherited, but it is, in a far greater degree, a consequence of education; it is unmistakably evident that most of it is produced by the defective teaching under which they live. The only boys in France who, as a rule, realise our notions of pluck, and manliness, and honour, are the children of country gentlemen (of whom there are few enough), brought up to ride and shoot; to live out of doors and to behave like men. The immense majority are indisputably little curs, funky, tale-tellers, and nasty. How can such boys ever grow into brave men? and yet they do, a good many of them at least. Their defects can scarcely be attributed to the direct influence of their parents; for whereas most of the girls, in families of decent position, are brought up at home, the boys, almost without exception, are sent to school. It is at school, it is from each other seemingly, that they pick up the sneaking little notions which are so universal amongst them. They make faces at each other, they kick, they slap; but as for real hitting—as for defending a point of honour—as for hard, rough games, where force and skill are needed,—who ever heard of such things in France? At school they are taught book-work, at home they are taught affection. They may become learned, and they do become affectionate; but, positively, they do not become what we mean

by manly. The whole life of France is different from that of England. Wealth is distributed there with relative equality; there are few large fortunes. Boys are brought up almost exclusively for professions, trade, or Government clerkships, with the prospect of having to live their lives out with insufficient incomes, and without ever tasting pleasures which cost money. The training which our boys need to fit them for the generally energetic occupations or pastimes of their after-life is unnecessary and unknown. We can pay for travel and for horses, for cricket, golf, and football, all which means money and leisure time. The French have neither; at least the exceptions are so few that they represent nothing in the mass. So, not wanting the preparation which makes men hard, and straight, and ready, they do not get it. Their education is intended to fit them for something else; and that something, whatever be its merits, appears to us to reach a lower standard than our own. And, furthermore, the French boy does not even attain the whole object of the education which he gets. He is particularly taught two things, by his mother at least—to love his family and to believe in God. He learns one of them, almost always, but he rarely learns the other. He remains, as a man, faithfully and profoundly attached to his parents and relations; but the religious faith,

which was so carefully instilled into him, generally fades at his first contact with the world, and with it goes a goodly part of the other principles which were simultaneously set before him. In discussing the causes of the defeat of France, Europe has not attached sufficient importance to the effects produced by the education of the boys, to the utter want of stubborn pluck which characterises it, and to the facility with which the higher moral teachings disappear when manhood comes. Here we seem to see that women do not suffice to make men. There have been, in history, some few examples of the contrary—the Gracchi, Constantine, St Louis, were essentially their mother's work; but, in modern France, something more is wanted than a modern mother's love can give. The French woman of our day can make good girls into charming women, and good women too; but it looks as if she could not get beyond that relatively inferior result, and as if she were as unable as the schoolmasters to whom she confides her boy to lift that boy into a thorough man. In the higher classes, where tradition still exists, and where money is comparatively less important than in the middle and lower stages of society, we see models of gallant gentlemen; but they are not numerous. In the late war the great names of France were everywhere on the lists of killed and wounded;

but despite the example set by Luynes and Chevreuse, Mortemart and Tremouille, and a thousand others like them, France did not follow; the nation did not like it. Can we suppose from this that good blood replaces teaching? It looks almost as if it does, and yet it seems absurd to seriously put forward such an argument in these utilitarian days. The French, however, say themselves that "bon sang ne peut mentir;" and it may be that, in this particular point, they clearly recognise the truth as regards themselves. Anyhow, whatever be the influence of hereditary action in forming men, it can scarcely be denied that, be it money or be it race, it is in the upper ranks alone that, as a rule, boy character assumes a vigorous shape in France.

The boys are girlish—at least no other adjective so correctly expresses their peculiar disposition. The word is not quite true, however, for the boys have defects which the girls have not. The latter are frank and straightforward; the former are not only feminine, they are something more and something worse. It is disagreeable to revert to the same word; but as the thing expressed is rare in England, one word has been found sufficient in our language to express it, so we must perforce say "sneak" once more. And here is the great distinction between boys and girls which was alluded to at the commencement of this chapter. The girls from their

earliest childhood give promise that they will turn out well, and will grow into what women should be everywhere, with an additional and special grace peculiar to themselves. The boys, on the contrary, are little-minded, pettifogging, and positively cowardly, as we understand cowardice in a boy. Until they can be changed, radically changed, there will be small hope of seeing France take her place once more amongst the nations. She will pay her debts, she will grow rich again; but so long as her boys are not taught pluck, and honesty, and frankness, they will never grow into men capable of feeling and discharging the higher duties. Many of them may bud into surprisingly better form than their youth indicates as possible—we see that already; but such cases are not the rule; and want of religious faith, of political conviction, of resolute will, of devotion to a cause, will continue to mournfully distinguish the population of France so long as its boys continue to be sneaks.

Many of them, however, are agreeable enough to chatter with. They generally have good manners (they beat us there); they are almost always tender-hearted and loving—they are even tolerably obedient; and, judging solely from the outside, it might be imagined that they promise well. They are devoted sons and faithful brothers; they work hard at books; while they are little, they say their

prayers; but there is no stuff in them. Discipline makes them brave if they should become soldiers; tradition does the same for the better born amongst them; but it is wonderful that such boys should have any latent courage at all, for their whole early teaching seems to us to be invented on purpose to drive it out. They are forbidden to fight, and scarcely ever get beyond scratching.

Now, is all this a consequence of innate defects of character, or is it simply brought about by the vile system pursued in French schools? Many a French mother will tell her boy always to return a blow, but somehow he does not. Whose fault is that? If the mother feels instinctively that self-defence should be inculcated as one of the elements of education—if, as is sometimes the case, the father supports the same view—it is strange that, considering the enormous influence of French parents over their children, they should fail to produce the result which they desire. The reason is, that the collective power of all the boys in a school is greater than that of any one boy; so that, if that one should act on parental advice and should hit another between the eyes, all the others will tell the master, and the offender will be punished as a danger to society and a corrupter of good morals—good morals consisting in making faces, putting tongues out, and kicking your neigh-

bour's legs under the tables. A Swedish boy at a *pension* in Paris was called a liar by an usher sixteen years old: the youngster went straight at him, got home his right on his teeth and his left behind his ear, and then asked if he would have any more; whereupon the thirty-seven other boys in the room rushed together at the Swede, rolled him on the floor and stretched themselves upon his body as if he were a rattlesnake in a box. When the poor fellow was got out, his nose was flattened and his arm broken. Those thirty-seven boys were quite proud about it, and were ready to begin again. They had not a notion that thirty-seven to one was unfair; and as for saying, "Well done, little one! hit straighter,"—so fantastic an idea could not enter their brains. If the Swede had made scornful mimicries at the usher behind his back, or called him by a variety of uncivil titles when he was out of hearing, the others would have vehemently applauded; but going in at him in front was not the solution French boys like, so they scotched the Swede.

No social merits can make up for such a lack of fair-play and courage. A boy may sing cleverly and paint in water-colours; he may talk four languages (which none of them do), and love his dear mamma; he may polish mussel-shells for his sisters, and catch shrimps at the seaside, — those

polite acquirements will not make him a good fellow; and though the French boy takes refuge in such diversions, he is none the greater for it: they don't help to lift him into a man. He is pretty nearly as expansive and as demonstrative as the girls; he has an abundant heart; he is natty at small things; but he cries too easily, and thinks tears are natural for boys. No one tells him that emotions which are attractive in women become ridiculous in men; so he grows up in them, and retains, when his beard comes, all the sensibility of his boyhood.

And yet there is no denying that, like his sisters, he contributes wonderfully to the brightness of home. His intelligence is delicate and artistic; his capacity of loving is enormous; he possesses many of the sweeter qualities of human nature; and, provided he is not tested by purely masculine measures, he often seems to be a very charming little fellow. Children of both sexes constitute so essential and intimate a part of indoor life in France, that they naturally and unconsciously strive to strengthen and develop their own indoor merits; and it is fair to call attention to the fact, that when the subject of education is discussed, French parents always urge that the object of all teaching being to fit the young for the particular career which they have to follow, their boys

ought necessarily to be prepared for social and family duties rather than for the rougher and harder tasks which some other nations love. But, however true this argument may seem at first sight, it is, after all, specious and unworthy. The end proposed in France is not a high one; and we have lately seen how the acceptance and the practice of a low standard of moral education has broken down the people as a whole, and has rendered it incapable of discipline, of order, and of conviction. Its conduct during the last two years has been composed of fretful excitement, alternating with petulant prostration. Excepting the gallant few who have nobly done their duty during and since the war, the French have acted like a set of their own schoolboys, who don't know how to give a licking, and still less know how to take one. Who can doubt, amongst the lookers-on at least, not only that France would have made a better fight, but would, still more, have presented a nobler and more honourable attitude in defeat, if this generation had been brought up from its infancy in the practice of personal pluck, and of solid principles and solid convictions? Who can pretend to define the principles and convictions which rule France to-day? Are there any at all? When, therefore, we hear it urged that French boys are educated for the part which they are destined to play in life,

we are justified in replying, that their fitness for that destiny appears to us to unfit them for any other; and that, though they may become charming companions, brilliant talkers, loving husbands, and tender fathers, full of warm sensations and flowing emotions, they have distinctly proved themselves to be utterly incapable of growing into wise citizens or wise men.

What is the use of turning round upon the Empire, and of piling abuse upon Napoleon III. as the cause of the shame of France? all that is but an accident, a mere detail in the whole. If France were but beaten in battle, she would be all right again within five years, for her material elasticity is prodigious, and her recuperative power almost unlimited. But her malady is graver than defeat—it is in the very heart-blood of her people. They have gone in for money-making, and for easy pleasurable existence. They have been pursuing little things and little ends, and they have grown incapable of big ones. They have suddenly been overwhelmed by a staggering disaster, and they can neither face it coolly nor deal with it practically. Two generations of vitiated education have led them unknowingly to this. The late Emperor confirmed the debasing system, but he did not originate it. It came in with Louis Philippe, if not with Charles X. If France is content to pro-

duce agreeable men and charming women, to show Europe how to talk and dress, and to set up science and art as the objects of her public life, then she can go on as she is, without a change: but if she wants to seize her place once more as a great political power; if she wishes to regain the respect and esteem of the world, instead of asking only for its sympathy; if she desires to reign, and not to amuse and please,—then she must begin by remodelling the whole education of her boys. There is no reason why her home life should be affected by such a change: it would not necessarily become graver or less lightsome; there would not be less laughter or less love; the boys need not lose their present merits because they would acquire new ones.

If so radical a modification in the whole tendencies and habits of the nation can be brought about at all, it is far more likely to be effected by the women than by the men. Frenchwomen, as has been already observed, are generally capable of noble action; they are singularly unselfish; and, despite their sensibility, they would not rest content with their present highly-strained adoration of the gentler elements of character, if ever they could be led to see that something higher could be added to it in their sons. It is to them, to their aid, that the true friends of France should appeal. They

cannot themselves upset the unworthy schools where their boys are now taught how not to become real men; but they can so agitate the question that their husbands will be forced to take it up and deal with it. The influence of women need not be purely social and moral: in moments of national crisis it ought to be exercised for other ends; and in the particular case before us, where the head is interested quite as much as the heart, French mothers might perhaps jump at the new sensation which they would experience by setting the example, as far as in them lay, of a change in the existing forms of teaching. Frenchwomen of our generation are not, however, Roman matrons. They attach a vastly higher price to the preservation of home joys, as they view them, than to the salvation of the State. The latter, according to their appreciation, concerns the Government. Centralisation has suffocated patriotism, in the real meaning of the word. Mothers strive to make good sons, not to make good citizens or solid men. The affections are placed upon an altar in France: all that can contribute to their development and their display is sought for not only eagerly, but naturally; all that can strengthen and adorn their manifestation is carefully watched and practised —so much so, indeed, that notwithstanding the indisputable sincerity of family attachments in

France, there almost seems to be a certain amount of acting in the way in which they are exhibited. Emotions may be said to have become the object of existence; and emotions imply so much external exposition, especially where they are unchecked, that whether their direction be tragic or comic, they often assume a somewhat theatrical character, which may induce the erroneous impression that they are put on more than they are really felt. If this powerful leverage could be applied for a healthy purpose; if, by a reaction consequent upon bitter experience, it could be set to work to elevate principles to the rank which sensations occupy; if thereby pure duty could be raised to a par with love, and manly self-devotion to an equality with tenderness,—then we might hope to see France rally. There seems to be no other way out of the mire into which she has fallen: the first step towards a solution must be taken by the mothers.

If we turn from these considerations to the purely home aspect of the question, we must acknowledge that it presents a very different picture. On that side of the subject nearly everything is pleasant and attractive. The French get out of their home ties pretty nearly all that homes can give; and if they do not attain perfection the fault does not lie with them, or with their system, but in the impossibility of making anything complete by human

means. The importance assigned to children, their early and constant intermingling with their parents' daily existence, the rapid growth in them of the qualities which repay and consequently stimulate affection,—all this is practical as well as charming. Boys and girls alike are taught that home is a nest which all its inmates are bound to adorn to the best of their ability; and if we could forget that all this enfeebles men, and renders them unfit for the outside struggle, we might, not unjustly, say that the French plan is the right one. But we cannot forget; the facts and the results glare at us too distinctly. We can acknowledge, if our individual prejudices enable us to do so, that the system looks excellent for girls; but we must maintain our conviction that it is deplorable for boys, and that to it must be assigned a large part of the responsibility of the past disasters and present disorder of France.

CHAPTER III.

FURNITURE.

Most of us have written more than once in our school copy-books, "Habit is second nature;" but though we may have assiduously inscribed the phrase with all the perfection of caligraphy of which we then were capable—though we may have often remembered and quoted it since—it is probable that we have at no time realised either its profound truth or the universality of its application. The very essence of habit is to blind us to its own effects, to render us almost unconscious of its own action, to divert our thoughts from the subjects to which it most applies. The stronger the habits we have, the more thoroughly we live in and with them, the more are we generally obliged to make an effort to remember their existence. Certain of them appear, indeed, to escape our observation altogether; they have so absolutely become "second nature," that, with the ignorance of ourselves which so humiliatingly distinguishes humanity, we cease

to be able to detect their presence unless we are aided to do so by witnesses more impartial than ourselves. And this habit of our habits, this custom of our customs, this incapacity of exactly appreciating our manners and our surroundings of every day and every hour, this necessity for making a mental effort before we can precisely judge of the extent and the effect of influences whose very perpetuity leads us to forget them, are in no way limited to our personal ways or acts; they apply with equal force to the material objects amongst which our life is passed. The walls of the room in which we sit, the pictures that hang upon those walls, the tables and the arm-chairs we use all day, the clock upon the mantelpiece, the books and the odd things that lie about,—all these are so familiar to our eyes that we almost cease to see them. Our habit of them is so thorough that we feel their absence even more than their presence; for most of us are more struck by the sudden disappearance from its accustomed place of an object which we have long seen there, than we were, until that moment, by the constant sight of the object itself. And yet this sort of permanent indifference is accompanied by an undercurrent of singular force, the very existence of which is scarcely suspected by the majority of men and women, whatever be the land they live in. That undercurrent is silently

produced in our minds by incessant contact with certain forms and certain colours; and, however ignorant we may be of its operation, it works steadily away below the surface of our observation, and creates in us, without our knowing anything about it, what we call our taste.

Taste, in its national aspects, can scarcely be said to be a natural faculty. Its manifestations have varied so utterly, its theories have been so contradictory, it has always been so unequally developed and distributed amongst the different races of mankind, it is so clearly a fruit of habit and education, that we are justified in regarding it as an acquired and not as an inherent power of our intelligence. Almost every one of the nations of antiquity created a type of taste for its own use, a type which apparently grew slowly through the stages of perfection which the improving capacities of its authors successively reached, and then faded away and was replaced by something else. Of all the products of ancient taste we have retained the power of admiring but very few. Assyrian bulls with plaited beards, Babylonian winged lions, Egyptian sphinxes, are examples of a taste which we have lost the possibility of appreciating; our education has set before us other realisations of the idea of beauty, and we are now unable to recognise either charm or truth in types which once were

evidently regarded as the highest expression of the then existing laws of both. The people of Nineveh and of Thebes must have learnt to cherish certain forms solely because those forms were set before them for daily contemplation, and because they slowly acquired a habit of particular lines and colours which by sheer force of contact impressed themselves indelibly on their memory, acquired the strength of a conviction, and so directed their national taste in a uniform direction. They, like ourselves, were just as capable of admiration for any other shape as for the special shape they chose; the slow march of habit, with its insidious influences, led them in a certain direction, and they finally reached their apogee of expression in the form of imaginary wild beasts, to which we in our time have grown unfit to accord any other merit than that of massive grandeur.

The same road which led our predecessors to mythological animals has led ourselves to very different convictions on the subject; but habit is our master as it was theirs, and we are forced to recognise that, however changed be the result, it is reached in both cases by the self-same path, by the self-same action of contact and of vision. Taste in shapes and colours can be learnt through the eye alone; the reasoning powers have nothing whatever to do with it. It cannot be acquired from books;

it is guided by no absolute or durable laws, for it is but the temporary expression of what we like because we are accustomed to it. Such a definition may seem sacrilegious to persons who regard taste as an abstract and eternal quality, essentially true and absolute in itself; but, without going into the question whether there really be, or can be, any such thing as unchanging truth in a feeling whose whole essence is to vary under the influences to which it may be successively subjected, it will probably be acknowledged, without discussion, that the application of taste to the limited class of work which forms the object of this chapter—to furniture—is necessarily as shifty as are the waves of the sea. There are, indeed, some few seemingly constant laws which may appear not to change: curved lines, for instance, look more graceful than straight ones—the paler tints blend more harmoniously than vivid colours; but these apparent principles may, after all, be but transitory like the rest; for who shall venture to assert that straight lines and contrasts of resplendent hues never have been or never will be adopted as the highest expression of taste? Surely the wisest and most honest interpretation of the word is to admit that it only expresses a preference, which exists to-day, which was not yesterday, and may no longer be to-morrow. Art, abstract art, is perhaps controlled by eternal

laws, but the same cannot anyhow be said of fugitive evanescent taste.

But, if we accept this definition, and if, furthermore, we acknowledge that the essentially transitory liking known as "taste" results solely from a temporary habit of certain types and shapes and shades, we reach another question, and are forced to ask ourselves how it is that the very objects which thus form our taste are themselves perpetually changing, so producing a corresponding modification in our taste as well? The answer evidently is, that two widely different fancies, taste and fashion, have unhappily grown to be almost synonymous; and that, for many centuries, taste has been a mere slave of fashion, and has been dragged in its trail wherever fashion chose to lead it. Abstractedly, nothing can be more false or more deplorable than this confusion of two ideas which have no necessary connection with each other; but, practically, especially in modern times, fashion has always imposed its will with such relentless vigour, that taste has been reduced to play à part of almost passive obedience, scarcely daring to put in a timid protest now and then against the outrages to which fashion has so frequently subjected it. The mass of us, especially women, tacitly attach the merit of attractiveness to everything that is, for the moment, fashionable, forgetting that the new object, whatever it be, has

in no way been created to satisfy what we suppose to be the real laws of taste (if indeed there be any such at all), but solely to stimulate trade by pushing aside previous models and introducing new ones. As society is now constituted, we rarely seek to form any tastes whatever for ourselves; we generally take them ready-made from the upholsterer, the dressmaker, the tailor, and the *modiste*, who naturally keep on modifying them as rapidly as possible, because it is their interest to do so, without feeling the slightest responsibility for the effect which they are producing on contemporaneous habits, and, consequently, on contemporaneous taste. These changes originate especially in France, which has thus gradually acquired the recognised position of leader of current taste, and which therefore offers remarkable facilities for an examination of the results produced in our daily life by the influence of that sentiment; or, to speak with more critical exactness, by the influence of the surrounding objects amongst which our life is spent.

Since Louis Quatorze, France has shown us five distinctly-marked periods of fashion. We may count Louis XV. and Louis XVI. as one, for the difference between the products of the two reigns is scarcely striking enough to justify their being separately classed. The Directory introduced a

totally new type, which, though it did not exercise any permanent influence on ideas, at all events indicated the point of rupture between the taste of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then came the Empire, the Restoration, and the Second Empire, each bringing its special models and its special school. Of these five epochs, two only, however, have presented a vivid character of their own: the First Empire was all Roman, the Second Empire was all Utilitarian; the first reflected the sympathies for Cæsar which filled the master's head —the second exhibited the love of material comfort which filled the people's heart. The men of Austerlitz sat at home in straight, square-backed, wooden chairs, ornamented with bronze dragons or copper eagles, which were abominably uncomfortable, and, according to our actual theories, outrageously ugly, too. The present generation, on the contrary, has been supplied with such incredibly agreeable *fauteuils*, so well wadded, so exactly calculated to receive the hollow of the back, that it is difficult to imagine how future manufacturers are to surpass their merit. We have here an advantage which the history of the fluctuations of taste but rarely affords us; we are able to recognise with precision the cause of the tendencies which sprang up during the two Empires, just as we know that the famous Isabelle-yellow came into fashion, at

the commencement of the seventeenth century, in imitation of the colour of the innermost garment of Isabelle of Austria, daughter of Philip II., who vowed that she would not change her linen until Ostend was taken, and had to wait three years for that event. The pursuit of ease and of satisfaction of the body being the main agent which has brought about the type of furnishing which at this moment prevails in France, we naturally find an intimate correlation between the habits of our generation and the upholstery which it employs. The demand has created the supply, and the supply reacts upon and strengthens the demand. The case is not one in which manufacturers alone have judged what they would offer for consumption; consumers themselves, contrarily to their ordinary habits, have indicated what they wanted, in general terms at least, and the action of the *tapissier* and the *ébéniste* has been limited to the development and variation of details. The public has shown in this an initiative of which there are few examples, and, in principle, it deserves encouragement and praise for acting for itself, instead of blindly adopting what its habitual purveyors offered it; but the effort has been made with accompanying conditions which deprive it of half its merit. If the French public had simply said, let us have chairs and tables and other necessaries, conceived and executed in the fittest

form for the use and service which they have to render, there would have been no fault to find; for the highest quality of a material object, whatever it be, is to be absolutely fit for its destination, and the realisation of the word "comfort," in its largest sense, is evidently the destination of modern furniture. But the French of the Second Empire were not content with fitness; they wanted something else beside: that something else was glitter; and it is because they have called for that, as well as for comfort, that their movement has gone wrong.

The worship of material satisfactions is not limited in France to the men of Belleville and their Communistic fellow-citizens in other towns than Paris. It exists as really amongst the middle and upper classes as amongst discontented workmen. Everywhere, with rare exceptions, the object is to extract enjoyment from exterior sources. The *prolétaire* dreams of it in the shape of warm clothes, good dinners, and blue wine, possessed without the pain of labouring to earn them: the people above him call for it not only in thorough comfort, but also in the form of gilded walls, and painted ceilings, and satin curtains, and countless looking-glasses, and all the other brilliancies in which the taste of the last twenty years has revelled. The objection to this disposition is not that it is false in itself—for if it be right to regard all manifestations of taste as

mere passing preferences, each of those manifestations is true so long as it lasts—but that it has raised matter to the same height as form, and has renewed in the nineteenth century the old Byzantine folly of measuring the merit of an object by its intrinsic splendour. It was an enormous progress to have called for comfort and for exact suitableness for special uses in all the utensils we employ; but it was an equally enormous error to have simultaneously required gold and glory, which represent absolutely nothing but money, in no way contribute to render home attributes more adaptable to their real purposes, rarely produce any satisfaction to the eye beyond the doubtful attractions of bright light and vivid colour, and incontestably swell the vanity of the owner. There are, however, people who honestly like to live in over-shining rooms; and though we may think them wrong, both in morals and in art, we have no right to condemn them for their taste. One person may have irresistible proclivities towards the glow of polished gold and the glare of scarlet—another, towards cold grey tin and white deal planks; and yet each may be intensely truthful in his preference. Practical philosophy teaches us that "le beau est ce qui plait;" and though Jouffroy, in imitation of Plato, pretends that beauty lies solely in expression and in truth, in the manifestation of the invisible by

the visible, of the higher sentiments of the soul by corporeal form—he has not succeeded in inducing the men and women of France to admit any other theory of beauty than that of pure personal liking. The abstract science for which Baumgarten invented the title of Æsthetics will never become popular, in our time at least. People will go on listening to their eyes and to their hearts, and will always be right when they say, "I like because I like." *Credo quia credo.* But though it is therefore fair to recognise that, so far as taste is concerned, the defenders of gorgeous decoration may be as absolutely convinced that they are right as others are that they are wrong, their position is open to attack on other and more important grounds.

Here we must revert to the influence of habit which was alluded to just now, for it is precisely the general employment of over-splendour which has generated, in a certain class of French society, artificial necessities of the most damaging character. Constant contact with exaggerated brightness leads weak minds—the mass of minds are weak—to a final incapacity of supporting the calm and relatively colourless aspect of ordinary homes. To such minds the absence of gilding ends by becoming synonymous with the presence of gloom; excessive use of light and colour produces on them a moral effect analogous to the momentary blindness which

we experience after staring at the sun; they lose the faculty of appreciating shades, and unconsciously crave for *tout ce qui brille.* And yet, true as this is in principle, exact as it is in its general application, there is in France a resolute minority which protests against the abuse of white, red, and gold, and their concomitants, which has come in with such a rush since 1852. This minority includes the thinkers, and the artists, and the poets, or, at all events, the people who describe themselves by these three designations; and it angrily complains of the harm done to the younger members of the generation by the lamentable art-teaching to which they are subjected. The majority replies that the first duty of indoor life is to attract, no matter how; that the struggle between outdoor temptations and home joys has grown into one of the great social difficulties of our time; that women are waking up more and more to an appreciation of the fact, that they are fighting with the outer world for the control of men; that society, as it is now composed, can only be held together by the bribe of perpetual excitement; and that the rooms which receive society, the chairs in which women sit, the dinner-tables at which men eat, ought all to contribute, in the highest measure of which they are capable, to the one essential object of attraction. In this sense, walls and furniture are regarded as a

frame which improves a picture. The argument is specious : in another form, indeed, it represents a most important truth, as we shall hereafter see ; but, put in this shape, it is altogether beside the question. In reality—and no practised observer of French life, or, at all events, of Paris life, will say the contrary—the result ordinarily sought for in the organisation of a drawing-room is, not to win others to it, but to achieve a brilliancy which satisfies the vanity of its occupant. That is where the harm is done ; that is where the unceasing glorification of show tells its own tale, and works out its consequence ; it all is vanity. What other meaning can it have? Who can urge that constant and excessive brightness brings no fatigue, that the eye is always satisfied to gaze on luminous colour and coruscating lustre? Who of us would choose, of his own free will, to sit night after night, amidst a hundred candles, reflected from mirrors at every angle, surrounded by universal crimson standing out on dazzling white? That is not what our natures need ; our real requirements are of a very different kind. Exceptionally, and for the same reason which sometimes leads us to look at fireworks, we may find pleasure in gilt and blaze ; but we weary of them fast, and cannot force ourselves to accept them as ordinary home companions. And yet, in most French houses of the better sort,

they glare at us with pitiless perseverance, not for our joy, but for the master's.

It is indeed refreshing to turn aside from this too sparkling current into certain rooms where something else than vanity has been at work; where every colour employed suggests the thought of harmony and repose which guided its author's choice; where every material is in its place; where grace, fitness, and, above all, personal expression, are the results desired. The forms may be almost the same as we see elsewhere, for shape has now attained in Paris a perfection so nearly absolute, that the most exorbitant critics can scarcely suggest improvement in it. But form, admirable as it may be, does not suffice alone: it needs selected colour to set it off; and, if it were not absurd to say so in talking about furniture, it might almost be added that it needs expression to give it life. Form, colour, and expression, the three elements of beauty, are not solely the attributes of men and women; animals, and even inanimate things, may also possess them. But though many of us may be disposed to avow that there is expression, as well as form and colour, in a violet or a rose, it would be somewhat extravagant to suggest that furniture may possess it too. And yet, when we look round certain houses, does it not almost seem as if the objects in them have

natures of their own? Their unity of tone is so thorough, they present such evidences of subtle fancy, that they appear to have acquired character and meaning. Of course they manifest the ruling passion of our time; but, with it, there is something else and something more, something that reveals individual thought and gives almost vitality. In this dining-room there is an atmosphere which we do not often breathe elsewhere. All is dark-brown cloth and ebony; but the weakened daylight which struggles in through the heavy curtains finds resting-places and mark-points on the angles of the old *faïence* which stands upon the dresser, on the steel hinges of the sideboards, and flickers vaguely on the yellow and dull blue of the hanging lamp. Brown walls set in black beading frame in the room, and lend their aid to its austere but grand effect. The drawing-rooms are painted in a tint which the catalogues of colour do not define—something between a fading China rose and half-ripe Indian corn. Narrow bands of faint pearl-grey surround each panel, and here and there a thin line of gold relieves the gentleness of tone. Chairs of varied shapes, all made for comfort and suited to the position which each sitter may wish to take, stand about in pleasant irregularity. They are clothed in different stuffs of all the finer sorts, so that the varying sheen of damask, silks, and

satins may prevent the uniformity of one material; they are embroidered with fantastic flowers of every hue, but calculated so that each shall mingle with and neutralise the other, the object being to subordinate each part to the whole effect. As the French say, "nothing screams;" all fits well together. And plants with variegated leaves, and books whose very bindings have been calculated for the place they have to occupy, and the thousand trifles which lie about,—the work-basket from which skeins of wool are cunningly allowed to overflow, because their colours will serve a purpose —the laced handkerchief left trailing there in the angle of a sofa, in order to light up by its whiteness a too dark corner,—all these things show thought, all are contrived with skill and art, with the one object of creating a thoroughly charming room, where the *banalité* of to-day has never entered, but where the mistress asserts herself in her own handiwork. Now go to the bedroom, and from the doorway absorb it with your eyes, for never have you seen a picture more complete. The walls, the hangings, and the seats, are all in pale-blue satin (she is fair), edged sparingly with velvet of the same shade, and embroidered daintily with pale moss-rose buds, swathed in still paler yellow leaves. But this description, though exact, gives no idea of the effect produced by that won-

drous tissue, of the incredible effect of delicacy and thorough feminine elegance which it sheds around. The room is filled with vague floating grace; its every detail is combined to aid and sustain the almost fairy aspect it presents. The bed is shrouded in thickly-wadded satin curtains, inside which hang others made of muslin so vaporously filmy that its folds seem almost mist; the coverlet, which hides the lace-trimmed sheets and pillows, is in blue satin lined with eider down, and covered with the same veil of floating white, hanging down in a deep flounce over the woodwork of the bed. The toilet-table is the same—a nestling maze of transparency and lace, with blue beneath, and knots and streamers of mingled satin and velvet round. On the chimney-piece stand a clock and candlesticks of Sèvres china. The piano is in pale *bois de rose* (not rosewood, which is a very different substance), inlaid with plates of painted Sèvres to match. At night light comes from above, where hangs a lamp, of Sèvres again. In our day, with our actual ideas and actual wants, such rooms as these are typical; they represent the highest form of realisation of modern taste without its faults, or rather, with as little of them as is consistent with the expenditure of so much money and so much thought. In these rare cases, vanity seeks for another satisfaction than that of

glare, but vanity is at the bottom all the same; the only difference is that it is accompanied by a true sense of art.

Bright or graceful furnishing being a monopoly of the rich — that is to say, of a few thousand families in France—it follows that all these considerations are true of those families alone, and that they have scarcely any application to the mass of the population. The habit of poverty and simplicity renders it relatively easy to dispense with elegance; for though there are certain natures which instinctively pine after it though they have never possessed it, the rule incontestably is that in this, as in so many other things, "l'appétit vient en mangeant;" contact with pretty objects teaches us to like them. Here again habit produces its effect. But this same habit which, in the one case, raises the level of needs, and with it the faculty of appreciating everything which satisfies those needs, produces, in the other case, an exactly opposite effect, for it aids to maintain undiminished the roughness of life and manner which is generally coupled with roughness of home fittings. It is needless to consider here which of the two is the cause of the other; that question is outside our present subject: but it is certain that whereas delicate surroundings conduce to delicate ways and movements, coarse furniture contributes to

coarse habits. Here it is that we detect the secret influence of furniture on home life. A man smokes his pipe in a hovel and spits upon the earthen floor; but an intuitive hesitation would prevent him from doing either in a carpeted drawing-room. Travellers sometimes lie down upon the dining-table in a roadside wine-shop; but the same people would act otherwise in a Paris *appartement*. Amongst all the peasantry of Europe tidy cottages are signs of improving manners and of growing refinement of thought; and, whether it be as a cause or as a consequence, furniture marches upwards with education. This fact, however, is general, not national; it exists everywhere, and is no more special to France than it is to England or to any other country. It is not amongst the French poorer classes that we find any peculiar results or any local influences produced by the habit of particular objects; the rich alone supply a field of observation on the subject, and show us marked tendencies and manners accompanying a marked class of furniture. It is, however, just to add, that the sudden collateral development during the last twenty years of much vanity and much gilding—taking gilding as the type of the entire movement—has certainly been aided by the rapid progress which has simultaneously occurred in the upholsterer's art and means of action. Uni-

versal exhibitions and what is now called industrial art came in with the Second Empire, just at the moment when quickly-acquired fortunes called for material enjoyments: demand and supply arose together. This part of the subject merits consideration.

Before 1851 French furniture had attained the reputation of being superior, both in design and execution, to that of all other countries. An impartial witness, M. Œchelhauser, representative of the Zollverein, said, in his report on the first London Exhibition, that "the opinion of all connoisseurs recognises unanimously and formally that the French are victors in this competition. Purity of tone, harmony of composition and ornament, choice of materials, of colour, and of the special qualities of each article of furniture, suitability of style to the destination in view, incomparable ability in workmanship as regards both carpentry and sculpture, a happy disposition of decoration which avoids excess, original inspiration — all these qualities united, make the section of French furniture one of the most striking in the Exhibition." It must be owned that such a position as is here described supplied a vigorous point of departure for the creations of the Second Empire. At the Paris Show of 1855 the success of France was still more evident; it was attested by singular purity and simplicity of

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forms, by the growing abandonment of purposeless ornamentation, by the increased use of animals, birds, flowers, and other nature-subjects, as sculptured details, in place of Cariatides and so-called classic designs; and, above all, by the strict appropriation of each object to the use for which it was designed. Delicacy and grace, easy and convenient usage, a constantly increasing choice of woods and stuffs, were the striking features of the second Exposition. Mahogany and rosewood (*palissandre*) ceased to be the main elements employed. Ebony, and its admirable imitation, blackened pear-wood; the brilliant products of Algeria, such as thuya (which mainly supplied the cabinetmakers of Imperial Rome), *lentisque*, cedar, and olive; grey maple, amaranth, the lemon-tree, and the so-called violet,—supplied an infinite variety of resources, of which the most intelligent advantage was taken. The thuya especially, of which the importation does not date back more than twenty years, is as magnificent a substance as can well be imagined. "The richness of its golden brown, the *moiré* of its veins, the capricious elegance of its spots, the fineness and the firmness of its grain, its sparkling polish, and the inalterability of its fibre, combine to put it first amongst the elements of *marqueterie*." Simultaneously the manufacture of stuffs and tapestries took an enormous stride. The famous tissues made

at Neuilly in imitation of Beauvais and Aubusson, the *moquettes*, the *cretonnes*, assumed a variousness of design which made them look like new inventions; while the list of habitual fabrics was increased by the adoption for men's bedrooms, billiard-rooms, and other simple usages, of coarse grey canvas, with straight or zigzag ornaments in coloured woollen braid. Almost at the same moment appeared the galvanoplastic applications, which rendered it so easy to employ metals for certain indoor purposes; and with them came those perfect imitations of old French and Italian earthenware which have raised French products even higher than those of Minton.

With such an abundance of materials, and with an equally abundant call for new furniture suited to the new tastes which had sprung up, it is not strange that the Second Empire should have marked a strongly-accentuated phase in the history of home decoration. A society was formed for the encouragement of art applied to industry: utility and practical suitableness were the fundamental conditions of its action; but it sought to graft the highest attainable art development on the especially utilitarian tendencies of the moment. Its annual exhibitions, though relatively small, brought together admirable collections of high-class work in all the branches of furniture; and though it cannot

be said to have influenced the character of either consumption or production as a whole, it indisputably aided to raise the higher products of the upholsterer's and cabinetmaker's art to a higher level still. These exhibitions were visited by large numbers of persons, whose object generally was not only to amuse themselves and to pass a pleasant hour sauntering amidst pretty things, but also to improve their own notions of the elements of ornament, of the means by which they can be best set forth, and of the rules which, however transitorily, now regulate their employment. Unfortunately the prices of the greater part of the objects shown were far beyond the limit of ordinary purses, so that most of the admiring lookers-on had to content themselves with contemplation instead of possession; the lesson to the eye was therefore momentary and not durable. But on real art-lovers, of whom there are a good many amongst the educated classes in France, the impression made was real: it had the eminently practical result of awakening in them the desire to imitate, at lower cost, what had most struck and tempted them in the show. This does not mean that they went away with the unworthy idea of ordering third-rate copies of high-class work, but that, having well studied a type attained by expensive means, they called upon their own imaginations to invent

an analogous result with simpler and consequently cheaper materials. The theory that the general effect of a room exclusively depends on the richness of the woods and stuffs of which its furniture is composed, is certainly very widespread in France; it reigns there as a natural consequence of the odious white, red, and gold mania which is still in force: but there is a growing minority which, as has been already said, thinks and acts for itself, and which, while it in no way discards expensive substances, asserts that many of the best effects of tone and character which furnishing is capable of producing, are obtainable exclusively by its simpler and cheaper agents. Here, however, there is some confusion in the French view. It does not appear to establish a sufficient distinction between the results brought out by these two means of action: it seems to lean towards the idea that their effects can be rendered virtually identical, not, of course, in fact, but in the quantity and nature of the enjoyment which the view of each of them produces in the beholders.

The whole influence of furniture on home life, its *rôle* as a medium of education, and especially its action in the formation of taste by daily contact, are in reality involved in this one question of comparative effects. If it could be urged that satin and chintz, sculptured buffets and plain deal cup-

boards, embroidered *fauteuils* and straw chairs, delicately-painted panels and whitewashed walls, all create in us the same emotions, all satisfy our eyes to the same degree, then evidently it would be folly to pretend that there is any teaching in the subject, or that any signs of national character can be detected in it. But as it may be fairly taken for granted that no educated person will assert that he is insensible to such contrasts; as, on the contrary, every one will probably acknowledge, though in different degrees, that he is accessible to distinct and various impressions provoked by the aspect of the room in which he is,—that acknowledgment is enough to prove the reality of the argument that we are all of us, more or less, morally and materially influenced by the objects which constantly surround us. And if this be true as a general rule, it is especially so of such emotional, sensational people as the French, and, more particularly still, of that part of them of whom we have just been speaking, who go about seeking for new ideas to realise. It is on this class—a limited one, it is true — that the art exhibitions of the last twenty years have exercised their full effect; it is amongst its members that we must seek for the highest manifestations of thought in modern furnishing, because it is they alone who have struggled against the meretricious splendours of the

Second Empire, and have steadily maintained that Art, properly so called, leads us in a very different direction from that which modern taste has pursued. It is therefore to be regretted that many of these champions of truth do not more explicitly distinguish the natures and proportions of the pleasure to be derived from the sight of each class of decoration. Pure brilliancy, of which we see so much in France, rarely satisfies even the outward eye; it seldom carries its impression to the head, far less to the heart; its predominant effect on us is to weary, excepting always such of us as like it, which every one is free to do. Well-studied, calculated elegance may attain a very high degree of perfectness; but if it be elegance alone, with no living thought behind it, it chills us easily, and sets us wondering what it is that is not there. Besides, unless excessive elegance be manipulated by a master-hand, it degenerates too easily into frivolity, and it almost always has the grave defect of sacrificing the aspect of the whole to little considerations of mere detail. At the same time it must be owned that there are to be found in the employment of the brighter tissues, of the lighter colours, of the Pompadour type of ornamentation, resources of admirable value, especially for use by candle-light. It is not possible to combine a room the effect of which shall be equally complete by day and night; it is

necessary to select one or other of the two sorts of illumination, and to be guided by its laws. As drawing-rooms are ordinarily used in France rather in the evening than in the afternoon, it may be admitted that, as a rule, they ought to be furnished there for artificial light. If so, the use of pale shades of satin and damasked silk is easy to defend. But while we may admit this theory for drawing-rooms and for a lady's bedroom, it is impossible to even listen to such a word as elegance when applied to dining-rooms or libraries; and this inadaptability of the word to all the uses of a house proves at once that elegance alone will not supply the right solution. Furthermore, both brilliancy and elegance are somewhat in contradiction with thorough fitness. It is easy to conceive an article of furniture—a bed, a chair, a table—which in form shall be absolutely suitable for its end, but of which the use shall become impossible, because it possesses too much splendour for that use. Ordinary furniture, such as we see in second and third rate houses everywhere, is simply serviceable, and nothing else: it provokes no feeling in us, excepting some regret that so many people should remain indifferent to the contentment of the eye and to the unconscious development of their taste which a more careful choice of their belongings would afford them.

Here, then, are three sorts of furnishing, plentiful enough in Paris—sheer shininess, intense elegance, and commonplace. Each provokes in us a different appreciation, but not one of them is satisfactory either to an artist or to a student of the joys of home, amongst which a well-imagined, well-executed *ameublement* ought to occupy a front rank. The French feel instinctively the truth of this latter fact, as was shown just now when speaking of their argument of "attraction;" but, as was then observed, most of them distort the question, because they rest it on vanity instead of heart. Pure love of home, for its own sake, is the one ground on which a perfect realisation of home adornment can be based. No one can make a thorough home for anybody but himself. The slightest desire to awaken the admiration of others enfeebles individuality of conception, and introduces into what should be an exclusively personal work, that miserable pandering to other people's approbation, which, in England as well as in France, is called vanity. There are cases — though not many of them — where the entire self of the inhabitant is put in evidence in his habitation. It is indeed a privilege to find such homes, for they alone enable us to judge character correctly by its manifestation in the choice of furniture. Money is indispensable for these realisations of personality;

but it is astonishing to see how the highest natures of effect can sometimes be attained with a relatively limited expenditure. The salient characteristics of such work as this are the subordination of ornament to utility, the relation between the character of the ornament and that of the material employed, and the entire subjection of detail to the whole effect. Sobriety is its striking feature; elegance ceases to be a result, and is used only as a means; brilliancy is utterly discarded excepting as a source of necessary light in certain spots. These conditions are, however, only general; it is in their application that thought comes out, that each separate nature stamps its mark. Some few men—and women even more—will tell you, over in Paris, that their furniture is the child of long reflection, of careful analysis, of patient comparisons; the one object being to produce a material demonstration of themselves. They will say to you, in the curious words of Wolowski, Professor of Political Economy and Deputy for Paris, that "the principle of their taste springs from the spirit and the soul instead of being the slave of instinct and the senses;" they will idealise the subject; will speak of it as one of the truest forms of practical art; and especially will insist, perhaps even to exaggeration, on the immense importance of the

eye-teaching which furniture is now called upon to distribute.

In cases such as these we must naturally be prepared to find everything in its place, to recognise in each room a marked fitness for its duty. We shall no more discover cloth or velvet in a drawing-room than we shall see satin in a dining-room, or pale-tinted walls in a library. The exigencies of the epoch, translated into the loftiest language of which they are susceptible, call for unities which are only obtainable by the adoption of special materials for each use. In France, certain rooms alone authorise the employment of the more delicate substances; others need the graver tones of woollen tissues; others again claim printed cottons and plain painted tables, drawers, and chairs. Side by side with these conditions stands the law which necessitates the use of apparent wood in dining-rooms, and which prohibits it almost entirely in drawing-rooms, where both ease and grace are only attainable by covering up all seats with wadded stuffs which hide their frames. No word-painting can convey a sense of the result produced when theories like these are realised in all their fulness, when every detail is absolutely perfect, but when no detail strikes the eye because all is merged in the common whole. Sight, and nothing else, can carry the picture to our brain. And in such

cases the finish of the accessories is worthy of all the rest: there are no "faults of spelling," however small. The earthenware is of a lightness unknown in England, where, whether an object be in metal-work, in crockery, or in wood, there is usually a massiveness, a waste of matter, which may give useless strength, but which certainly destroys all grace. The dishes, plates, and knives are all considerably smaller than those employed on this side of the Channel; the tints chosen for the decoration of the table services are carefully adapted to the colours of the furniture of the dining-room; while their patterns and designs are kept down to the least accentuated outlines so as to create no distraction for the eye. The ornamentation of the table is a triumph of good sense and knowledge; it ought indeed to be always so, for the science of adornment offers but few occasions of equal interest, as all artist-minded Frenchwomen are well aware. It shows character and breadth of composition, with ample space and no crowding or excess of detail; there is harmony between the hues of glass, and flowers, and dessert (the Russian service is the only one now used in France); the whole aspect is one of gaiety mixed with calm. As all the lighting comes from lamps and candles suspended overhead, the eye is not dazzled, it suffers no fatigue, and ranges over the entire table,

because every ornament is kept low, so as not to mask the diners from each other. The calculation of effect at table is so profound a question, and is so keenly felt by certain women, that it comes into evidence sometimes in the subtlest forms. A lady told her servant that six people were coming that night to dinner—that as they all were friends it was not necessary to spend ten francs for flowers—and that, therefore, the green ferns in daily use would do for the centre-piece; "but," she added, "as we shall consequently have no brilliancy in the middle, take care to choose the *bonbons* and the cakes of vivid colours so as to compensate its absence, otherwise the table will look dull." There is a delicacy in this conception which is beyond ordinary thought. If from the dining-room we turn elsewhere, we notice that the frames of the pictures and the mirrors are lighter and more soberly modelled than those which we use here; that the marble chimney-tops are all covered with silk, or cloth, or velvet, according to the furniture in the room; that crisp white curtains hang inside the others in every window and over every bed; that in the lustres, and the candelabra, and the branches, are candles which have been lighted for ten minutes, because a candle which has served gives an inhabited and useful look which a bran-new one in no way supplies; that all the lamps are full of

oil, and wait only to be lighted. Brightness, comfort, and practical utility are everywhere.

But, alas! such perfect realisations of home skill are very rare. In a large acquaintance one may, with good-luck, find half-a-dozen of them, and not all of equal merit. The rule is, in Paris, that all rooms are alike, that they contain the same inevitable Second Empire products—and, in the country, that people sit in the seats of their grandfathers and think they are doing right. Personality is an attribute of the few; the mass takes what it finds, imagines that there is nothing better, and so loses the education and the enjoyment which it would attain by thinking and selecting for itself. Nine-tenths, or rather ninety-nine hundredths, of the population are unable to comprehend the very smallest part of what the other hundredth thinks; the influence of habit is too deep and constant to permit them to recognise either the deficiencies of their own condition, or the advantages of other systems. Their taste—for it is just as much a taste as any that the very highest art-sympathies can provoke—accustoms them to what they have, and they are content with it: all we can do is to "leave them alone," as the lotos-eaters said, and hope that they will open their eyes some day, and learn that they can do better.

And now let us consider what are the effects

produced by the various types of indoor aspect on the persons submitted to their influence. Let us first take children, and see what they are taught by them: they afford the easiest ground to study, because they have no prejudices in the matter, because they are virgin of all convictions, because they are even more susceptible than grown-up people of extraneous action, and because their faculty of absorption of impressions by mental capillarity is extremely great. These two latter conditions are important in a work where contact is the only agent, and where results are unconsciously attained. A child accustomed from its babyhood to either of the extremes of furniture, to common idealess objects, or to the highest perfections of art-combination, will naturally acquire a degree of taste-education in proportion to the silent teaching to which it is thus submitted. It may possess innate dispositions which, in after-life, will modify the fruit of that first education; but it cannot be denied that, whilst still a child, it will, without knowing why, support the neighbourhood of ugliness more easily in one case than in the other. This is a first consequence, and a palpable one, of the contrast which we are supposing, and it probably acts in two directions, negatively as well as positively; for many of us have noticed cases in which a peasant's child has been almost as unable

to reconcile its gaze to the elegancies of the chateau, as the chatelaine's girl to bring down hers to the rough details of the cottage. And it is useless to pretend that this is but a consequence of shyness and timidity, and that unconscious habit, or taste, its synonym, has no hand in it. That might possibly be true if the poorer of the two children alone drew back from the contact of new objects; but it is precisely the richer one—the one whose taste has acquired the greater force and the more solid conviction—whose sense shrinks most, whose eyes feel the most dissatisfaction. Surely there is evidence here of the reality of the schooling in which each has lived, and of the different lessons learnt from that schooling. Neither of the children could define the motive of its emotion, but both of them would distinctly feel it, and would manifest it without knowing why. The girl or boy who grows up amidst harmonies of form and colour, and intelligent applications of material, imbibes therefrom a spontaneous notion of what is meant by practical taste in its everyday uses; and it is not going too far to say that the art-dispositions of such a child are fined down, and are rendered more delicate and more discriminating, by early association with good models, and that its power of appreciating the beauties of nature is, in consequence, strengthened and extended. To a good

many people this may seem like dreaming; but if they will make an effort to remember how easily young minds receive the impress of surrounding sights, they may perhaps admit that there is truth in it.

When a child has once acquired the power of distinguishing clearly between what pleases it and what does not, it is in a condition to form for itself its own first theory of taste. It may modify it afterwards, but our early apprenticeship is never thrown away; and it has the advantage of habituating the mind to the idea that taste originally results from habit. In later years comparison comes into play, and then begin in each of us those strange successive changes of opinion which alone would suffice to prove how variable and shifting are our maturer views upon the subject, and how impossible it is to lay down from year to year any unvarying definition. But this very versatility has its use; it exercises the imagination, it stimulates the pursuit of novelty, it provokes intelligent competition between the manufacturers of furniture, it opens a healthy field of action for the employment of fortune, it renders luxury justifiable. And, more than all, it extends the field of action of daily art-teaching by the multiplication and the variety of the lessons which it places at our disposal. There may be—indeed there is—a large mass of

men and women who go about from house to house with careless eyes and inattentive perceptions, who never profit by what they see, and who indeed are incapable of supposing that there is anything round them to profit by. But there is in France (and perhaps elsewhere) another class which seeks instruction and enjoyment in all the acts and sights of life—which thinks that nothing is too small to learn from or to look for—which remembers that charming flowers are often hidden in the shade, and that the science of life lies rather in the diligent extraction of satisfactions from ordinary sources than in the pursuit of exceptional excitements. These are the people to whom a perfectly organised room speaks audibly in a language of its own; these are the people who will attempt, and often with success, to give a diagnosis of your character from a simple examination of your furniture; and though the assertion that such a faculty can be acquired may not improbably provoke an incredulous smile amongst those whose organisation does not lean that way, the fact is absolutely true. Children to whom such theories have been explained by their mothers, and who have thus obtained an early intuition of their meaning, pick up by habit and practice a power of observation and of retention of details, of comparison and consequently of judgment, which is of the highest value

as an agent of education. It is not unusual to hear a French girl of twelve or fifteen years old accurately describe a complicated object of which she has barely caught sight for a few seconds. For instance, she will depict, in its most elaborate particulars, the entire dress—boots, watch, and pocket-handkerchief included—of a lady who has simply passed her in the street—a complicated object enough in these times. She will tell you, in reply to your curious question as to how she did it, "Oh, I undressed her at a glance." She does not need to look twice; her perceptive organs have grown so acute, her classification of impressions is so instantaneous, that she absorbs without an effort; and the astonishing minuteness and correctness of her dissection are as striking as the rapidity with which it is performed.

This is a great power to possess. It reacts on the intelligence in many ways, especially in strengthening the analytical faculties. Of course it may be denied that it is a product of early contact with art-teaching, and of the precocious development of taste by the mere effect of surrounding objects; but what is its cause if it be not that? France is, as yet, the only country in which questions of this kind have provoked practical results as well as theoretical interest; it is there alone that, as a rule, we find this ready quickness, this

rapid observation. If they were a special property of the race, we should discover them everywhere, more or less; but we detect them solely amongst the educated, and only there in certain cases of which the history can generally be traced back to a point of departure based on home art in some kind of way. We need not, however, seek to build an argument on these exceptions, for the mass of the population supplies all the evidence we want, though of course in a less striking form. The character of the home in which they live leaves its impress on the majority of the people. It is true that there are many natures which are utterly insensible to influences of such a kind, just as there are ears which have no care for music, and eyes which are unable to distinguish red from yellow; but the rule in France is, that each distinct class of furniture makes a mark on those who use it, and exercises a perceptible action on their manners and aspirations. People whose chairs and tables date from the Consulate, who possess one dim looking-glass, a cuckoo clock, and no carpet, cannot anyhow be identical in their views of life or their fashion of expressing them with families of 1872, whose *fauteuils* exude softness and friendship, who regard bright light as a necessity of life, and who hate imitations of bird-cries. The former will pro-

bably be sternly virtuous; the latter will be by no means stern, and possibly not virtuous either, but they will be pleasant, and "of their epoch." Wooden furniture may be perhaps provocative of lofty principles, while padded sofas and their adjuncts may conduce to worldly views. But where would be the use of their faculty of resistance to temptation if our neighbours let themselves be beaten by the luxury of their arm-chairs? Are we necessarily constrained to own that their morals are enfeebled by over-comfort, and that the vigour of their character has diminished in proportion with the development of their elegance? That the French have gone down the hill is an accepted fact; that the lust for material satisfactions is one of the causes of their decline, does certainly look probable: but if it be so, we need only deduce therefrom that the arguments against pure brilliancy and pure elegance which have been put forward here are real, and that modern taste alone has done the harm. All this, however true it may be, proves nothing against art. It indicates, on the contrary, that safety lies in a return to higher principles of decoration, and in the abandonment of the coarser satisfactions of the eye. It is but a small side of a great question, and yet it has its weight; the regeneration of what was once a noble people might be aided by a reform

in furniture, by a vigorous expurgation of sham splendours and of everlasting appeals to wretched vanities.

And yet, though, in the name of art and elevated feeling and national improvement, we condemn the furnishing of the Second Empire, the feebler elements of our nature do find pleasant features in it. As moralists, as artists, as philosophers, as political economists, we are bound to say it is too full of gaud and glitter; but as men and women with human weaknesses, we cannot help acknowledging that it does make life more cheery than it used to be when we were young, when we were forced to sit bolt-upright on hard chairs with knobs on them that ran into our shoulders. After all, brightness and warmth and softness do help to unsadden weary hearts, do aid to make manners gentle, do stimulate gaiety in young children, do frame in love. There is many a house in France where the whole aspect of indoor life is lighted up by the fitting of the rooms, where the home-tie grows stronger under the influence of satisfied and contented taste, where the husband comes in gaily from his work, eager to look once more at the charming picture in which his wife is the central object. Honestly let us own that, when a man feels of his own home that it offers him more attraction than any other place on earth, it is a sign

that good causes are at work; and let us hesitate before we apply a sweeping condemnation to a system which, whatever be its faults, has merits too. What we may wisely hope for is, that present practices may cease with the cessation of the circumstances which produced them; that grave events may make taste graver though not less winning to ordinary natures; that art may drive out gewgaws; that the more delicate forms of furniture may gradually descend into common use, and carry their civilising influence everywhere. Thus far that influence applies to the upper classes only: increasing cheapness of production, coupled with increasing needs in the lower strata of society, may propagate it widely; and some day future students of the history of civilisation may recognise the real importance of the part which furniture has played in the progress of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER IV.

FOOD.

PASSENGERS at sea generally eat five times a-day, partly because the air makes them hungry, partly because they have nothing else to do. On shore we are less voracious and more occupied, but still we can scarcely get along agreeably without three meals. Some of us pretend that it is humiliating to be thus afflicted by purely animal needs; others, on the contrary, are of opinion that, as feeding is a delectable operation, we ought to be very thankful that we can perform it so frequently; a third class thinks nothing about it either way; while doctors, economists, and historians regard eating as a grave question, as one of the keys to health, and as a serious element in the progress of civilisation. And there is another point of view—more interesting still. We meet to eat; our repasts are made in company; they bring families and friends together; they exercise a unifying effect of enormous force. From Homer downwards, poets have sung the

charms of what they call "the festive board:" they have praised its softening action, its power of stimulating good temper, cheerfulness, and gaiety; of dispelling anger, sadness, and discontent. The poets are right; nothing has ever been invented which soothes like dinner: and, without going so far as to suggest that it is a great moral cause, it may at all events be said with truth, that it stands in the front rank amongst the material influences for good which are at our disposal. Of the functions of home life it is indisputably the highest; no other daily act can be compared to it in character, in importance, or in result. All the races of mankind feel this; even savages may be temporarily tamed by the sweet spell of mutual dinner; and as we rise in the scale of education the manifestation of its power grows clearer and clearer, until we reach the pinnacle of its development in certain European homes.

In no country are the higher uses of eating more thoroughly appreciated or more seriously pursued than in France. The eminently social nature of its people, their singular skill in the preparation of food, the power which they so generally possess of extracting pleasurable satisfaction from the most ordinary acts, combine to enable them to lift up dinner to a level which is rarely reached elsewhere. Of course there are sufficiently abundant excep-

tions in other lands to show that intelligent dining is not really a monopoly of the French; but they alone realise it as a national fact; they alone, as a whole people, get out of the act of eating all that it can give. This superiority is not solely due to their culinary ability; the perfection of their dining is not an exclusive consequence of scientific cooking: the cook's work is but one of the two secrets of success; the other lies in the temper of the diners, and in their keen perception of the character of the operation which they are performing. There is evidence of the truth of this in almost every decent house in France: dinner is regarded as the principal event of family existence, as a moment of moral expansion rather than as a simple process of nourishment; for, excellent as the feeding ordinarily is, it alone would not raise meals to the importance which they assume amongst our neighbours. The people come to them not only to eat but to laugh, to charm the heart as well as to satisfy the stomach. The consequence is that, as a rule, great cookery is neither used nor needed in daily home life. The ablest professors of the delicate art of arranging food, the profoundest *chef*, the most skilful *cordon bleu*, can contribute, after all, but little more than their less learned colleagues to the real object of everyday dinner: it is only on special occasions, at great festivals,

that their capacities find room for exhibition. Ordinary life does not require, and cannot utilise, transcendent ability in the kitchen—it wants lightness and brightness and laughter; and it is because they unite those merits to true home cookery that French families know how to dine.

Still, however true all this may be, however much the national tempêrament may contribute to the effect attained, the nature and the execution of the dishes form the essential groundwork of a dinner in France just as they do elsewhere. Bad feeding destroys gaiety; good cookery is consequently called for quite as much for the sake of the moral influence it exercises as for the pleasure which it offers to the tongue. But when we look indoors across the Channel, we find that the phrase "good cookery" has a meaning that we do not know. It signifies something more than cunning variety, skilful handling, and pretty serving up. The deepest sense of the two words lies in the possession by every *plat* of the particular taste which is proper to it. To persons who have never directed their attention to this point, or who have had no opportunity of studying it, such a definition may seem either meaningless or incomplete, according to the bent of their individual impressions on the subject; but, from the French point of view, it sets forth the highest law of cooking. To put the case quite

clearly, it is essential to recall the fact that wealth is the exception in France, that poverty is the rule; that prudent thrift is generally practised, even when it is not imposed by irresistible necessity; and that economy of housekeeping consequently stands first amongst domestic duties. Now, economy means privation, to some extent at all events; but though the French generally live very cheaply—though, with few exceptions, their outlay is within their incomes—though they do without what they think they ought not to pay for, they do not suffer as others would from this want of money, because they possess the priceless faculty of making the best of what they have. This capacity extends to almost every detail of home organisation, but it comes out with conspicuous distinctness in their management of food. The eating in middle-class French houses, inexpensive as it is, is certainly far superior to that of the majority of the richer classes in other countries. It consists of fewer dishes, of smaller quantities—it is composed of low-priced articles—its habitual range is limited; but the execution of each dish is perfect in itself, and the variety of the forms of preparation makes up for the relative absence of variety in the substances employed. The French are too poor and too wise to waste money in the purchase of fish, flesh, or fowl, when any of them cost more than their regular current

value. These extravagances are left to people who are really wealthy, and to the faster elements of society in Paris and a few other towns. The nation never perpetrates them. But the nation, poor and saving as it is, requires that each dish shall be itself, with its full aroma, its full essence, its own character. It knows, by long experience, that poverty does not prevent the exercise of skill: it sets the latter off against the former—it replaces money by intelligence.

The first step towards the end in view is to so employ the sum allotted for the kitchen that it shall produce its utmost value, not only in quantity and quality, but, what is even more important, in suitability. Going to market does not simply mean clever buying; it involves the far higher talent of adapting the choice of the provisions bought to the use which it is proposed to make of them. The law—so absolute is the habit that it may be called a law—which limits each day's purchases of food to what can be consumed in twenty-four hours, imposes the condition that everything shall be in small quantities; that is the basis of the entire question. Next comes the fitness of each object for the form of cookery to which it is to be subjected. No Frenchwoman, be she cook or mistress, would dream of buying the same chicken for a *fricassée* as she would select if she meant to roast

it; the same vegetables to put into a soup or to serve alone; the same meat for stewing and for a *rôti*. She would always choose an inferior and cheaper article in one case than in the other, knowing that it is useless to spend money in good looks when she has a sauce to depend upon which will cover ugliness. The difference of expense resulting from the application of this principle may certainly be averaged at a tenth, but the additional economy which is produced by the exclusive use of little quantities is considerably more important. Here, however, the effect is complex: it is not limited to the direct diminution of waste in the ordinary sense of that word; it extends in two or three directions, and brings about various consequences which remain invisible until they are closely looked for. Those consequences, however, form one of the great elements of the subject, and it is well worth while to bring them clearly into light.

First of all, less fuel is required to cook a small dish than a large one. French kitchen-ranges do not resemble those which are still so generally in use in England, where the same vast mass of coal goes on blazing itself away, whether its heat be employed to boil a kettle or to roast a sheep. In France, especially in the country, cookery is carried on with wood or charcoal fires, kept down to a low smoulder when not needed for the moment, and

roused up to activity in five minutes when the time comes to use them. The same exact adaptation of means to the end, the same diligent pursuit of small economies, is discovered here, as in all other details of the subject: a fire to roast a chicken is made just big enough to serve the purpose; the combustion of a pennyworth of charcoal boils or stews the contents of two saucepans at the same time; directly the operation is complete the fire is covered up with ashes, or is put out. Small quantities do not take so long to cook as big ones, so they need heat for a shorter period; and even in the case of soups, and of the few other dishes which require hours of gentle simmering to bring them to the point, the very nature of the process prohibits strong flame and its accompanying loss of fuel. "*Cuisinez doucement*" is the first counsel given to a beginner; and that means, amongst other things, never have a bigger or a hotter fire than you really want; for if you do, you will waste money, and will burn your *casseroles* and their contents.

The next consequence of the French system is that everything is eaten up. As there is only just enough, nobody has a chance of leaving anything; waste is suppressed because it cannot exist without a surplus, because its very possibility depends on an excess of supply over consumption. A very short experience will show a cook how much total

weight of food she has to serve each day; and, the measure once acquired, she invariably acts upon it, and provides just that much and no more. The whole house knows that it will never be offered more than it can use; and that if the dinner of to-day should seem to go beyond immediate wants, it is solely because to-morrow's breakfast is included in the estimate.

But the great source of economy lies in the diminished use of the dearer articles, and in the correspondingly increased employment of the cheaper ones. If a great piece of meat, costing twelvepence a-pound, is placed at the disposal of a hungry family, it will naturally be eaten at until everybody is content; but if a far smaller joint, which only partially satisfies their appetites, is put before them, with a supplementary allowance of soup, bread, and vegetables, representing, at the outside, an average price of threepence a-pound, it follows that these latter elements of the dinner will be consumed in large proportions, and that the total cost will be diminished in the exact ratio in which three is substituted for twelve. This example is, however, far too simple; it expresses the arithmetic of the case, but it gives no idea at all, either of its infinitely-varied applications, or of the ease with which such substitutions are carried out in France without any lessening of the attractive qualities of dinner. But

as, for the moment, we are considering only the money side of the matter, such an illustration is sufficient, because it shows distinctly how the adoption of small dishes of each sort of food enables French housekeepers to economise on the dearer articles.

It is scarcely possible to form any reliable calculation of the total comparative saving which is brought about by the union of these three consequences of buying in little quantities—that is to say, of lessened fuel, suppression of waste, and the setting off of cheap food against higher-priced articles. At a guess, however, it may be put at about a third; which means that under the French system—supposing prices to be exactly equal in both cases—a sovereign will go as far as thirty shillings would in England. This is the material result of kitchen management in France, and no one will deny its grave importance. But when we come to see that this vast economy of expense is accompanied by extraordinary superiority in the nature of the food itself, we ought to regard our own food arrangements with stupefaction, and to ask ourselves when we are going to have sense enough to profit by the example set us across the Channel.

In England, taking the people as a whole, and excluding the special cases, there are but four known national ways of dressing food—roasting, frying,

boiling, and that inconceivable horror known as "hash." Roasting is not badly done by us, and we fry soles fairly; but there end our faculties: what we call "boiling" is one of the most senseless acts to which human intelligence can descend; it is an inexcusable, unjustifiable, wanton folly. To people who have been "boiling" all their lives, these adjectives may seem strong; but have they ever really asked themselves what this boiling means? Have they ever reflected for one instant over the operation they are performing? To boil food, be it meat or be it vegetable, is to extract from it, first, its volatile aroma, then its essences and juices, and, finally, its power of nutrition; aroma, essence, juice, and strength go out into the hot water, leaving behind them the fibre which they have quitted. Now in France this process is called making soup; the water becomes excellent, but the materials which have imparted their nature to it, are considered, with some few exceptions, to have lost all claim to be considered as real food, and are only used as inferior aliments. So thoroughly is this principle applied, that even the water in which white haricots or cauliflowers have been boiled, is always kept to serve as a basis for vegetable soups. Every liquid which has received the extracted flavour of a boiled substance, is looked upon as precious, and is employed again in some special

form, so as not to waste the properties which it has acquired. In England, on the contrary, when we have carefully abstracted from turkey, or from beef, from chicken, ham, legs of mutton, green peas or beans, all that steady, red-hot boiling can take out of them, we eat the tasteless, azoteless relics of our work, and we diligently throw away the "dirty water" which contains all the nutrition that we have distilled. This may be worthy of a great nation, but it is not easy to see how. Scotland, at all events, uses mutton-broth; but no right-minded Englishman will condescend to swallow any such "stuff," or if he does, he calls it "hot water stirred with a tallow candle." If ever prejudice and ignorance were thorough synonyms (as they almost always are), it is surely in their application to British cooking.

Now, look at France and see what is done by the people who, according to our lofty convictions, live contemptibly on "kickshaws." Their dogma is, that everything which is in food ought to be left in it by the cook and to be found in it by the eater. The entire practice of French cooking, both in form and in result, is contained in that one article of faith; its consequence is, that the whole nutritive elements of every substance employed pass into the stomach, instead of being partially poured down the sink or sent out to the pigs, as is

the case in this free and eminently great country. Yet we despise the eating of those miserable French, with all our hearts, and look scornfully down upon it from the glorious summit of our boiling. The explanation of this insanity—though the word explanation is miserably misemployed in such a sense—is, that we imagine that because we buy more meat than they do we are necessarily better fed. So perhaps we should be if we swallowed it all, though even then a good deal might be said against so needless a use of flesh; but as we take out of it, by what we call cooking, at least a fourth of its alimentary value, we do not in reality get any more chemical result out of the sixty pounds of meat (beef, mutton, veal, and pork) which each inhabitant of Great Britain (babies included) devours on an average every year, than the Frenchman does out of the forty-five pounds of the same nature which he consumes. He, at all events, extracts the uttermost from what he digests, for the simple reason that it is all there to be digested; not a grain of it has gone into the sewers or the sty—it is all in the dish, either in solid or in liquid. We should think it folly to throw away the gravy which exudes during the act of roasting; but not only do we take it as quite natural to fling to waste the entire product of the far more exhausting process of boiling, but we resolutely apply that

process to the larger part of what we eat, as if it were the right thing to do.

Excepting the harder vegetables the French boil absolutely nothing, in our meaning of the word at least. From Dunkerque to Bayonne, from Nice to Strasbourg, not one ounce of anything goes into the pot unless it be to make soup: but then the nation lives on soup. Roast meat costs too much for the everyday consumption of a population whose earnings average eighteenpence a-head: so they feed on a copious stew of bacon, sausage, cabbage, potatoes, and bread—and very good indeed it is, provided one is hungry. This aspect of the case, of course, excludes all idea of serious cookery; it means feeding and nothing else; but it is feeding in which everything is food, where what has been stewed out stops in the stew, where not one scrap is lost, where every centime spent produces its full result in the stomach.

The same law applies everywhere, in every rank. As we rise in the scale of outlay, and, consequently, of types of nourishment, we find no change; the principle is the same throughout the land—eat everything, waste nothing. But the details become vastly more interesting when skill comes into play, for then we see what art can do to adorn economy. The cooking at French hotels and restaurants, which is all that most travellers know anything

about, gives but a faint idea of the feeding in use in families; for not only are the quantities and the expense much larger in one case than the other, but the flavours are stronger, coarser, less varied, and less true. It is inside real homes that French eating should be studied, for it is there alone that it can be examined in reality and in perfection. The nation—whatever we may think—does not dine at *cafés;* such a plan would break up the affectionate habits which the French so fondly cherish; it would be disagreeable and too dear. The nation takes its nourishment within its own four walls, so as to get it better and cheaper, and to retain, in all its force, the eminently social character of the act. And this applies to every class, without exception; for the great dinners in Paris private houses are as superior in delicacy and refinement of execution to what the best restaurants can produce, as is the home feeding of the peasants to what they could get in the country wine-shops. *Café* cookery employs, even in its highest forms, too many artifices; it seeks too much to attain effect and vigour; it is not natural; its sauces are too powerful—they hide the intimate essence of the food: in one word, it does not realise the fundamental principle of carefully preserving unimpaired the particular aroma, the special perfume, which should inherently belong to every

dish, and which gives to it its own distinctive nature. And furthermore, the restaurants never offer to their customers certain well-known dishes which form part of the regular daily list for home use, and which stand so high in French appreciation, that they are ordered several times a-week in moderate houses. Such are the more ordinary vegetable soups (whose name is legion), the endless shapes of stews and of the simpler ragouts, the hundred forms of preparing eggs, the infinite variety of cheap *plats sucrés*. It is useless to attempt to describe such products, or even to give a list of them, especially as they are to be found in all the cookery-books; but their number is so great, and their merit is so real, that they alone suffice, without including the high-class cookery, to place French feeding above that of the whole world outside.

Here, however, habit and previous opinion may perhaps claim to have their say, and to protest against anything but "plain joints." There are many virtuous people who live and die in the intense belief that what they so oddly call "made dishes"—as if everything they swallow were not "made" too—are unwholesome and unworthy, and that "roast and boiled" are the sole manners of preparation worthy of British teeth. There is absolutely nothing to be said in reply to such ideas,

for prejudice is so hard a master that it prevents all possibility of fair comparison, and blinds us to the most convincing proofs. It would therefore be quite useless to expect that, for the reasons already given, any real Englishman will believe that these "made dishes" are quite as nutritive as roast meat, and are vastly more so than the same substances when boiled. Even the strong arguments of economy and almost unlimited variety which the French system supplies, might fail to produce any real effect on minds which are resolved beforehand, as so many are, that nothing is to be learnt across the Channel. But there are enough inquisitive people round us to make it well worth while to show in what this economy and this variety consist, so that they, at all events, may judge whether they will try to begin the revolution which, sooner or later, must be enforced in English eating.

In giving details of the cost of housekeeping, the difficulty is to choose a thoroughly fair example which honestly and truthfully sets forth an average case without exaggeration either way. Twenty years ago it would have been impossible even to attempt to do so, because the cost of food then varied widely all over France, certain places being about twice as expensive as others. But railways have now changed all that; they have levelled prices almost everywhere, and have suppressed

those singularly cheap residences in which English people used to seek refuge, like St Malo and St Omer. There are still a few outlying villages, fifty kilometres from the nearest station, where a chicken can be got for eighteenpence; but with those exceptions a chicken is now worth about the same all over France: and the same may be said, in substance, of every other article of food. The towns are dearer than the country, because of the *octroi* dues which are levied on all provisions which enter them, but that difference can be allowed for with tolerable exactness; and it may be estimated, without much fear of error, that the cost of food in France is now about 10 per cent higher in the towns, and 20 per cent higher in Paris, than it is in the rural districts. Of course this calculation is not intended to apply to every case; it shows only a general mean, but that mean is near enough to the reality to enable us to work upon it. It must, however, be added, that during the last few years, and especially since the war, prices have gone up enormously, and that the figures which express the present cost of living are certainly one-third higher than they were in 1855. With these explanations before us, let us take a middle-class Paris family, living reasonably well, wisely economical, but in no way stingy, and let us see how its account-book stands. In order to provide fair ground of com-

parison with the outlay of an English household of corresponding rank, the example chosen is that of a cheery home, which includes nine people—three big ones, three little ones (who eat like big ones), and three servants. It should be added that there is somebody to dinner nearly every day, a dinner-party once a-month, and that the service is performed with a tolerable amount of elegance.

From the 1st September to 30th November 1871 (ninety-one days) that family expended 1801 francs, 10 centimes (£72, 0s. 10d.), in food of every kind, excluding only wine; so that the exact average per week was 140 francs (£5, 12s.) As there were, including friends, ten people fed every day, the cost per head per day amounted to exactly two francs, or one shilling and sevenpence. This outlay included £7, 6s. 10d. for three dinner-parties of about a dozen people each. During the same period the cost of the wine consumed was 504 francs (£20, 3s. 2d.), of which 264 francs were for ordinary wine, and 240 francs for good wine. Meat, in all its forms, with poultry, represented £30, 1s. of the total, and consequently came to £2, 6s. 8d. per week, which gives 6s. 8d. per day, or 8d. per head for each of the ten people. Bread cost £7, 1s., and the rest was spent on a consider-

able variety of objects, as is proved by the fact that the cook's book contains an average of sixteen entries every day. That was the cost; now let us see what they got for it.

Coffee and bread-and-butter began the day at eight o'clock. At half-past eleven came the breakfast, composed of two dishes of meat, one of vegetables, cheese, dessert, and coffee. The children had a small eating of their own at half-past three, made up of bread-and-jam, chocolate, or fruit. The dinner included soup, an *entrée* and a *rôti*, vegetables, sometimes a *plat sucré*, cheese, dessert, coffee, and *liqueurs*. At nine came tea or *tilleul*. And do not let it be imagined that all this was simple cookery; a good deal of it was so, but each day brought out at least one *plat* which required experience and execution, while the *menus* of the dinner-parties were little gems of delicate workmanship. This latter part of the subject is perhaps worthy of detailed analysis, for English housewives may, not improbably, be curious to know how much a Paris dinner costs the giver. In the case before us the servants are exceptionally intelligent, and do everything without orders or surveillance; the mistress has only to say to the man, "Twelve people to dinner to-morrow; the best service; tell Marie to bring me her ideas;"—and

when the cook has submitted her "ideas," and the *menu* is settled, the lady troubles her head no more about it. Such a privilege is, however, somewhat rare; the rule on these occasions is, that mistresses of the middle class (it would be useless to talk of the very rich) are obliged to look about themselves a little, to order the dessert and to arrange the flowers. The programme which we will examine was for ten persons; every article in it, excepting the dessert, was executed at home by the cook alone; this is what it cost, all ingredients included:—

	£	s.	d.
White soup,	0	4	3
Tunny, olives, and radishes,	0	1	7
Fillets of sole, à la Orly,	0	6	9
10 cailles au nid,	0	16	2
Timbale Milanaise,	0	5	2
Roast fillet of beef,	0	10	2
Salad,	0	0	6
Green peas,	0	2	0
Fried cream,	0	2	5
Cheese,	0	1	7
Dessert (composed of wondrous things from Boissier's),	0	11	4
	£3	1	11
Deduct for economy on the expenditure of the following day, in consequence of the relics left in hand,	0	10	0

There remains for the cost of the eatables, £2 11 11

	£	s.	d.
Forward, . .	2	11	11
Wine—			
1 bottle of Montrachet, . .	0	2	6
2 bottles of Chapelle de Chambertin,	0	6	6
2 bottles of Gruaud Larose, .	0	10	0
2 bottles of Champagne, . .	0	12	0
Coffee and liqueurs, . . .	0	4	6
Flowers, ...	0	4	0
Candles and extra fires, . .	0	7	0
Additional man to wait, . .	0	4	0
Total cost of the entertainment, .	£5	2	5

All these items are copied textually from the cook's book, excepting the wine, which appears at its original cost when bottled and laid down in the cellar years ago, but which now represents two or three times the value shown. Two of the dishes in the list merit explanation—the *cailles au nid* and the fried cream. Each quail, when cooked, is ornamented with his head, tail, and outspread wings; he is then placed on his "nest," which is formed of the bottom of an artichoke, and is half filled with simulated eggs made of white stuffing. The nests are arranged in a circle in a large round dish, and bathe in a dark-brown sauce. A prettier combination to look upon, or a pleasanter one to eat, can scarcely be desired. *Crême frite* consists in balls of hot, liquid, creamy custard cased in a diaphanous golden pellicle of frizzled batter; in the mouth they burst and melt with a result that is fantas-

tically delicious. And the wages of the woman who creates these impossibilities are £19 a-year!

Two questions present themselves here. What would such a dinner have cost in England, if indeed it could be produced here at all in any ordinary house? And how is it that French peasant girls, at £19 a-year, can attain the talent necessary to achieve so admirable a success for £2, 11s. 11d.? The first of these two queries may be left to get an answer for itself; the second takes us into a new element of the French food question.

It is evident that the system which prevails in France could not exist at all if the genius of cookery were not naturally implanted in the heads and fingers of the class of women who administer the kitchens. But no innate predisposition towards the culinary art would enable a Normandy farm-girl, who has spent her youth in guarding her master's geese and turkeys, to make fried cream. Study, manipulation, and experience are needed before she can reach such a height as that; and how is she to acquire them? She does it because Providence has been pleased to make her imitative and laborious. She leaves the geese when she is fourteen, and becomes scrub at £3 a-year under the village notary's wife; then she is appointed plate-washer at an inn in the neighbouring town; she rises to the post of kitchen-maid, and in that

capacity learns to pare vegetables, and to roast a little, and gets her first insight into serving. At two-and-twenty she has saved up £5, 3s. 6d., and with that she starts for Paris, "where she has a cousin." Here she becomes kitchen-maid again, but in a decent family, where things are nicely done, and where the cook knows her business. From that moment begins her education, but instead of lasting half a lifetime, and of being contemptibly incomplete at the end of that long period, as is the case with our own food-spoilers, twelve months suffice to enable the French girl to cook cleverly for her own account. Then she shifts her place once more, and gets £16 a-year in a quiet family, where the mistress looks after the kitchen herself, and gives counsel to the cook. Most French ladies know a little of the delicate rules which regulate the preparation of food—in theory, at all events; some of them even are brilliant executants with their own hands; the consequence is, that the new cook gets all the advice she needs, and after a little floundering, begins to utilise the power of copying which the French possess in so singular a degree. If the sacred fire of her art really dwells within her, she spends her evenings in profound reading of her cookery-book, which she devours as if it were an exciting novel; thus she leaps rapidly into a *cordon bleu*. But as

her intelligence develops down goes her honesty; one falls as the other rises, as a rule at least, so that the best cooks are generally the greatest thieves. In the larger Paris houses many of them regularly overcharge from three to ten francs a-day, according to their own ambition and the size of the establishment. These are not the women who permit nine people to subsist on £5, 12s. per week: that result can only be attained, either with an exceptionally honest cook, who is very difficult to find, or by constant verification from the mistress. Men-cooks are worse still: most of them coolly tell you that you must not expect them to be economical, as if the thought of saving their master's money were beneath their dignity. Still, taking France as a whole, particularly in the country, nineteen-twentieths of the cooks are steady, honest creatures, who add the painstaking research of little cheapnesses to marked ability in their trade. It is they who make French eating what it is—a compound of condensed nutriment, innumerable tastes, and low expenditure. In the example which has just been quoted, the cook is a good faithful servant, who takes hearty pride in all the reductions which she can operate in the weekly outlay. There are not many such in Paris, but there are tens of thousands of them in the provinces.

In considering the sum spent by the family we

are investigating, it must be remembered that the cost of each individual article was higher than that of the same object in the dearest town in England, In the country the same feeding could be achieved for one-fifth less, or £4, 10s. per week. It will now be understood that the explanation of this cheapness of total result, as compared with us, lies solely in the organisation of home life in France, and in the system of the cookery. It has been already said that the first sources of economy lie in the smallness of the quantities, in the consequent absence of waste, in careful marketing, and in the utilisation of every ounce of nutrition contained in the food. To these causes must be added the immense saving which is realised, in comparison with ourselves, in the feeding of the servants. In France servants eat immediately after their masters have finished, and content themselves with what is left. If the relics are really insufficient for their appetites, a special dish of some common kind is added—lentils and bacon, or cheap veal or mutton and white haricots, or sausages and pease-pudding. Never do the servants touch the more expensive sorts of meat; poultry, or game, or sweet things are utterly forbidden to them: all that may remain of that kind is kept for next day's breakfast. And yet they eat as much as they like, without stint or limit. By the association of these various con-

ditions, a family of nine people is enabled to live admirably well in Paris—infinitely better than its equals do in England—for 1s. 7d. per head per day, or in the country for about 1s. 3d.

This outlay is represented by a variety of dishes of which we have no conception; even in families who carry economy farther still, who deprive themselves of every luxury, who cut down their expenditure to one shilling per head per day, the forms of preparation are so multiplied that no sense of sameness is produced by the almost daily employment of the same cheap viands. To take the most ordinary example: the beef which has served to make *bouillon*, the most elementary and exhausted form of meat which can possibly be quoted, is prepared in nine different ways: it may be served cold, *en vinaigrette*—that is to say, cut into slices, with oil and vinegar, mixed up with anchovies and chopped herbs; it may be dressed hot, *au gratin*, or minced, *en boulettes*, or *en hachis*, the three latter being accompanied by mushrooms, or by a *sauce piquante*, or tomatoes; or it may be done *à la jardinière*, with various vegetables, or *en persillade*, or with onions, or *à la bourgeoise*, or in little pies. The object of these nine arrangements is to give back a flavour to the fibre which has lost it in long boiling, and to so utilise agreeably a tasteless remnant. The nine results are excellent,

but habit generally prescribes that they shall be employed for breakfast only, like omelettes, and the other forms of egg, which are never served at dinner. This illustration is but one out of a hundred which might be given; and if it does not suffice, let it be remembered that the first cookery-book we open will tell us how to make one hundred and ten soups and sixty sauces; how to dress beef in one hundred and seventy fashions, veal in one hundred and forty manners, and mutton in one hundred and twenty, without counting the interminable varieties of form, taste, and colour which may be communicated to game, poultry, vegetables, and eggs. Of pastry, puddings, and sweet *entremets*, there are more than three hundred sorts. And let it be remembered that every single one of these thousand dishes has its own special, individual, proper nature—its own aroma, which must be so exactly rendered that it can be instantly recognised and appreciated by the palate. Not more than one-twentieth of the preparations which compose this curious list are really used in daily home life: many of the compositions described in the 'Cuisinier Impérial' and its fellow-publications are too costly and too complicated for common use; but even fifty varieties of beef and mutton, and other ordinary aliments, enable a French household to change its feeding so perpetually that the

same dish is not used twice in a fortnight. That variety is not unhealthy, that "kickshaws" do not damage digestion, is proved by the rarity in France of dyspepsia and other disorders of the stomach: the lightness of the bread, the relatively moderate eating of the entire population, may partially explain this; but, at all events, the fact would seem to indicate that the whole system is a wise one hygienically.

The rarer products of French cookery are beyond the reach of the nation as a whole; daily home life knows little of them, but yet an allusion to them can scarcely be omitted in an examination of the food of France. It is, however, in their local rather than in their general character that they present real interest. Everybody has dined at Philippe's and the Moulin Rouge; everybody has eaten, at least once in his life, "when he was in Paris," one curious dinner of which the memory dwells within him; when he made acquaintance with a *bisque d'écrevisses*, and a *sauté de filets de sole à la Vénitienne*, and a *Kromieski de volaille*, and *cailles en caisse*, and a *crême à la Bourbonnaise*, or half-a-dozen other amazing compounds with similarly unintelligible denominations. But the number of us who have eaten grilled *Royans* at Bordeaux, or crayfish out of the Fontaine de Vaucluse, or *calissons* at Aix, or violets and roses

at Grasse, or *foies de canard* in the Périgord, or the other peculiar products of twenty other places, is probably somewhat limited. And, more than all, how many of us have dined at the Réserve at Marseille, that famous restaurant on the Mediterranean shore, where the brothers Roubion have acquired immortal fame? There is but one word in English which describes the sensation of the traveller who eats there for the first time—that word is revelation. New truths seem to be imparted to you as you swallow, new objects and new theories of life seem to float around you, strange ideas come to you across the sea; and when it all is over, when with a calm-bringing cigar, your legs stretched out, you silently digest and think, with the Chateau d'If and the flickering waves before you in the moonlight, you gratefully thank Providence for having led you there. All this is the effect of garlic, which works upon you like haschisch. You began your dinner with *Preyres*, shell-fish which are as good as oysters, and with them you drank the stony-flavoured white wine which grows on the rocks at Cassis, half-way to Toulon. Then you took a soup called *Bourride*, a fascinating mixture of creamy fish, thin bread, and *ailloli*, a *purée* of hot garlic. Then came red mullets, *en papillotte*, the woodcocks of the sea. Your mouth having become somewhat hot, you stopped to cool

yourself with Roubion's *Musigny* of 1837, stimulated by a little *Poutargue*, a preparation of fish-eggs superior to *caviar*. Comforted and strengthened you began again on fillets of duck, into which the essence of a hundred olives from the Crau had been injected by simultaneous stewing. One glass of *Latour* of 1854 materially helped you at this juncture. Then came a *Chateaubriand*, floating in a *remoulade* of which one-half was *ailloli* again. Here, as you well remember, you needed three more glasses of that *Latour*. Vegetables you refused, you had had enough; but you toyed a little with an unknown soft cake soaked in syrup of *Kirsch* assisted by un-iced dry champagne (*Roussillon's carte d'or*). Finally, you got to your hotel to bed, and tossed about all night in a red-hot fever. In your fitful sleep you dreamt that you were Monte Christo; and you felt frightfully ill next morning; that was garlic again: the people of the country told you, however, that you would become accustomed to it after four or five years of patient practice. "The sea hath its pearls, the heaven hath its stars;" England has Richmond and Greenwich; France has the Pavillon Henri Quatre at St Germain, and the Réserve at Marseille. Maids of honour and whitebait, however, do not reach the height of the *filet Béarnaise* in Seine-et-Oise, or of the *ailloli* in the Bouches du Rhone:

they are certainly the pearls and stars of lofty eating. If you doubt it, try. The white fish on Lake Superior, the prawns that get fat on the dead negroes who are buried in the sea at Rio Janeiro, the canvas-backs in October at Baltimore, are all sweet to eat and to recollect, but they are pale indeed by the side of *ailloli*.

The Réserve is, however, after all, only the completest expression of the cookery of the whole district; all Provence feeds on garlic: the annual garlic fair is the great event of the year in the villages which have the glory to receive it. And the old kingdom of René d'Anjou grows its own truffles too, and has red-legged partridges, and quantities of trout in the affluents of the Durance, and grives which really are most wonderful in the winter when the juniper-berries are ripe. But, good and curious as the feeding is in some respects, Provence is terribly incomplete; as there is no grass there are no cows, and consequently no fresh milk or butter, excepting what the goats give. Again, all roasting is performed there before brush-wood-fires, whose smoke lends a nasty flavour to the meat, just as the wine-skins in Spain make their contents taste of resin, and as English coal gives a special odour to our own roast-beef, which is instantly detected by the unaccustomed tongues of foreigners.

In the Bordelais the food is excellent; garlic is relatively rare, even amongst the peasantry; poultry is abundant, and the fruit superb; the nectarines particularly, are perhaps the finest in the world. The figs, however, are less perfect than the little green ones which grow in the mistral of arid Provence, especially for drying, but they have merit; and as for ortolans, Gascony may be called their autumn home.

In Brittany the eating offers no kind of special type, excepting for people who delight in buckwheat-bread, which is the only local product.

In the north-eastern provinces everybody is well fed; but, excepting the general use of *bisque* and of *beurre d'écrevisses*, which is rendered possible by the singular abundance of crayfish in every rivulet, there is no indigenous specialty.

The wise employment of herbs and of *tisanes* is universal. It belongs to no province and to no department in particular; it is everywhere throughout the land. No salad is complete without its *fourniture*, which consists of chervil, pimpernel, tarragon, and chives, all daintily chopped up, so that their subtle perfumes shall pervade the leaves of *Romaine* or of lettuce. Scarcely a sauce is possible without its "bouquet," which results from the distillation in it of a little bunch of parsley, thyme, and laurel. The water in which fish is boiled is pre-

pared beforehand by decocting the same herbs in it. As for *tisanes*, their name is legion; and though they are for the most part rather medicinal than nutritive, they occupy a sufficiently important place in the economy of French home life to merit mention here. The first and most notable of them all is *tilleul*, made of the dried flower and young leaves of lime-trees; then come marsh-mallow, violets, apple, cherry-stalks, orange-flowers, tucilage, camomile, ash-leaves, arnica, mélisse, verbena, fennel, erysimum, valerian, white stinging nettle, ivy, absinthe, hop-blossoms, and twenty others. Each substance possesses a special merit of its own, and produces a particular effect. Some are stimulating, some are soothing, some aid digestion, others bring about the most odd results by their action on our organs, one or two induce sweet sleep and abundant perspiration. In every house in France a stock is kept of these various ingredients, ready dried; when wanted, a little handful is thrown into a teapot, boiling water is poured over it, and in three minutes the gentle remedy is prepared. It is almost pleasant to be ill in France, in order to make acquaintance with such agreeable physic. The variety of substances in common use is so considerable, that it implies an extent of knowledge of herbs and simples beyond what we have any idea of here. This knowledge is insen-

sibly acquired in early childhood from constant contact and from constant use. Every French girl of ten years old knows what is the right *tisane* to administer in a given case; she gives it to her dolls for practice.

But if *tisanes* are universally and equally employed all over France, the same cannot be said of meat in its various forms. The inequalities of consumption are singularly marked between different towns. Each inhabitant of Paris pays for 130 lb. of butcher-meat every year (beef, mutton, veal, and lamb); but at Le Mans, the rate per head falls to 60 lb. Rennes and Rheims are the only two places which reach nearly to the Paris figure; all the other large towns lie between the two extremes. Of pork, in its many forms, Chalons eats the most, for it takes 35 lb. per head; Paris consumes 22 lb.; while Bordeaux uses only 5 lb. In liquids the differences are almost greater. Each Parisian absorbs 113 quarts of wine, 13 of beer, 2 of cider, and 12 of brandy; while Lille employs 18 quarts of wine, 153 of beer, 12 of brandy, and no cider. Rennes, on the contrary, needs 400 quarts of cider per inhabitant, and 21 of wine. At Rouen, the average swallowing of brandy reaches 45 quarts per annum for each man, woman, and child. But these figures, though they show us what the urban populations use, give no idea whatever of the average

consumption of the whole country, particularly in meat. Exact returns can only be obtained from towns where the *octroi* is enforced, and where, consequently, a precise account is kept of everything which goes in or out. But when it is remembered that the towns contain only seven millions out of the thirty-seven millions who people France, we see at once how valueless these figures are as a general guide. The mass of the rural population, which includes about three-quarters of the nation, does not eat butcher-meat more than once a-week, and even pork is an article of luxury. The consequence is, that the official returns indicate, as has been already said, an average consumption, throughout the eighty-nine Departments (this was reckoned up before the war), of only 45 lb. of all kinds of meat per head, pork included—which is less than a third of the Paris rate. Each Londoner eats 211 lb. of meat per annum, which is 59 lb. more than the Parisian asks for; but the latter claims 400 lb. of bread, while the former contents himself with 330. Paris shows, therefore, an excess of 70 lb. in this item. In vegetables Paris has a greater advantage still: each of its inhabitants consumes 300 lb. of them against 141 in London. Also in butter, milk, and fruit, Paris is ahead of us in varying proportions. In Prussia, Spain, the German Duchies, Holland, Belgium, and Italy, still

less meat is eaten than in France; in Southern Germany, however, the quantity per head is rather greater.

If we admit that Paris and London may be taken as fair points of comparison between France and England, these details, incomplete and insufficient as they are, suffice to prove that the average total weight of food of all kinds consumed per head across the Channel is higher than we attain ourselves. It is not made up in the same way—there is more meat here, more bread and vegetables there; but it may be said with certainty that any difference of nutritive value which may result from this difference of composition is more than compensated, not only by the extra quantities of other food than meat, but also by the form of cookery adopted by our neighbours, which, as has been insisted upon throughout this chapter, leaves in the food every grain of nourishment which it originally possessed.

It is therefore perfectly reasonable to assert that the French are at least as well fed as we are, if not better; while they spend much less than we do, and have vastly more agreeable eating. What is the reason of this difference? It cannot be attributed to climate, for the whole north of France is as wet, cold, and uncomfortable as any district we can show. Neither is it explainable by special physical

necessities on either part which call for a particular type of food. The only cause which we can assign for it on the French side is that undefinable, motherless influence, known as national peculiarity, the most untraceable of the great springs of modern life. Who can pretend to determine how national peculiarities arise? And even if we limit our consideration of them to this one point of the composition of the food of France, who can tell us why or how it has grown to be what it is? The handiness and the cleverness of the people in all culinary matters are but a national peculiarity after all. It is useless to refer to them for an explanation, for they simply throw us back once more on to the original difficulty. Poverty and thrift do not help us either, for other nations besides the French are poor and thrifty without attaining their consummate skill in cooking. All that we can say is, that the home ability of the French, their singular household craft, are appanages of their race; they have them because they have them, because Providence has so willed it, just as the English possess the specialty of hashed mutton, and of never going out without an umbrella. But, however hidden be the first origins of their present ways, we are able to indicate with approximate precision the actual elements of their dining power; if we cannot define its primary causes, at all

events we can detect its immediate agents. These elements, these agents, have already been referred to at the commencement of this chapter; but now that we have gone through the consequences and the effects which they bring about, we may, with much utility, return to the point we started from, and try to see not only what we can learn, but even more, what we can apply.

So far as it is possible to judge from the meagre details contained in the old chronicles of French home life, the system of feeding now in use does not seem to have begun to assume its form until about a hundred years ago; the accumulated contributions of three or four generations have sufficed to carry it to the perfection which it now presents. One example will be enough to show that, at the end of the seventeenth century, eating had in no way reached, even in the best houses, the character which it has acquired since. In 1678 Madame de Maintenon wrote a letter to her brother, who had just been married, to tell him how to live. After strictly limiting him to an outlay of fourteen francs per day (including wine, wood, and candle) for his wife, himself, and ten servants, she goes on to describe his *menu*. She says: "You will have a soup, with a chicken in it, and you will have all the *bouilli* served together in a large dish; it is admirable in that sort of disorder. You can have

sausages one day, veal another, or sheep's tongue, or a leg of mutton, or a shoulder, or two chickens. I forgot your breakfast, which is a capon or anything else, and a *compote* of pears or apples." There is no mention of any cookery here—it is all rough meat; no allusion is made to vegetables, which have since become so essential a basis of nourishment in France. If this were the feeding which the Comte d'Aubigné found sufficient, if this were the programme which the King's mistress sketched out for her own brother, it is reasonable to conclude that it represented a high average, and that the nation, as a whole, was far away behind it. It was during the Regency that real cookery may be said to have first been introduced, but its action was then limited to the upper classes only, and to the relatively short supply of materials, especially in fruit and vegetables, which the markets offered. As the cultivation of roots and of leguminous food extended, the range of kitchen action extended too; but, when we remember that it was not till about 1790 that even potatoes began to be seriously grown in France as an article of food, it becomes evident that the employment of garden-produce on a large scale is quite a modern feature in the composition of French eating. The use of vegetables, dried and fresh, fibrous and farinaceous, has gone on spreading until it has

carried their consumption to nearly half the total weight of food employed. The change in the details and results of cooking have been proportionately great, the entire system having been built up slowly to its present shape, with the successive aid of each new alimentary substance which time has added to the list. Concurrently with the invention and the development of new products the science of their uses has budded out; the entire question has gradually marched ahead, materially and artistically, throughout all France, stimulated by growing needs, guided by progressing education. This much, at all events, we can see and prove; where we fail to find any explanation is in the mystery of the starting-point: it is there that we are obliged to content ourselves with the vague unsatisfactory answer of "national peculiarities." But if we are unable to suggest why it is that the French can cook, and can go on discovering fresh forms of cookery, adding still more dishes to their prodigious catalogue, or why they have learnt to utilise so many articles which we neglect, so that every trifle which falls within their grasp is made to serve a purpose, at least we can clearly recognise what they use, and how they use it. They have not kept their cunning to themselves; they have published it to the world by example and by precept, inviting everybody to follow in their track.

Can we follow them? Can we, by degrees, adopt in England the system which has been worked out across the Channel? Can we attain our neighbour's faculty of eating cheaply, variedly, nutritively, and agreeably? That we can do so partially is probable, if not certain. Our upper strata are already trying it lamely and insufficiently, but with goodwill and satisfaction. Their progress thus far has been slow and incomplete. What they call "French dishes" are not yet French in the real meaning of the word; they are imitations, not originals. But we are getting on, and some of us may finish by acquiring the purity of taste, the delicacy of palate, the long habit of comparison, which permit the eater to judge whether the cook has correctly and critically done her duty. But is it to be expected that the entire nation can be led to modify its habits and to adopt the principles which regulate French feeding? To this question the answer can scarcely be affirmative at present. Even if our middle and lower classes could vanquish their deeply-rooted prejudices, and could be led to see and own that the first law of dressing food is so to treat it that it shall retain the entire power of nutrition which nature gave it, where are we to get the cooks? Even supposing that all the theoretical difficulties were suppressed—that the whole people, with one voice, called out for soup and stews, and

refused to go on with boiled and baked—where are we to find the women to whose hands we could intrust the realisation of the wish? The same law of national peculiarities which has rendered it possible for the French to create their system forbids us thus far to copy them. There, everybody knows how to cook, or can learn to do so rapidly: here, the genius of kitchen-work is absent; we are born without it, and we do not grow to it in after-life. What can be more deplorable than the helpless ignorance on the subject which is shown by the wives and daughters of our workmen? what can be more idiotic than the resolute refusal of all servants who are not cooks to learn what cooking is? Their repulsion is so deeply rooted, it is so inherent in their blood, that even the English nurse-maids who live in France invariably refuse to take a passing lesson from what is going on around them; they like the feeding infinitely better than that they get at home, but they will not condescend to study its production so as to be able to carry knowledge back with them on their return. Any serious transformation of our system is quite hopeless, so long as this fundamental difficulty continues to exist. The richer and better educated amongst us may struggle after change; they may even effect it to some extent; but the tradespeople, and the populace,

and the peasants will go on as they are, until their women are lifted up to a higher appreciation of their home duties, and of the infinite importance of food as a domestic influence for good. Let them keep their tea and beer: cider and light wines are not fitted to their temperaments, and, so far as liquids are concerned, our habits may perhaps be suited to our climate; but can we not discover and supply some really effective remedy to their actual indifference about the solid portion of their eating? In this country of public meetings and public charity, where everybody subscribes his mite to aggregate philanthropy, could we not establish cooking-shows, with prizes for the most proficient? It would be very easy to draw up a first programme, descriptive of a dozen dishes —of the simplest kind, of course, but involving the employment of various cheap ingredients, and especially of herbs and vegetables. The matter should be regarded solely in its application to the poor; it must be dealt with at the bottom—the rich can get along alone. The effort should be one of direct teaching rather than of example, for the simple reason that such examples as exist are hidden away out of sight in our dining-rooms, where the poor cannot contemplate them. Some such plan as this is probably the only one which would offer any prospect of success, and an entire

generation would doubtless have to pass away before the effort could produce its fruit. Still the result would be so excellent that both time and effort would be well employed. Our girls in country-houses, the wives and daughters of our parsons, could scarcely use their idle hours more usefully than in stimulating such a movement. There would be a practical reality about it which would please unimaginative natures, while the more dreamy of us would be attracted by the pretty theory of regeneration of national taste. Everybody would find some kind of satisfaction in such a work, especially the ploughman husband and the blacksmith brother when they came home to supper. Surely it is worth trying; surely we are not incapable of the attempt; surely we cannot all be so blinded by prejudice and stupid custom that none of us will consent to copy what the French do so vastly better than ourselves.

If we need additional encouragement, if purely material advantages do not suffice to tempt us to modify our doings, let us look back to France once more and see what moral results we could possibly extract from an adoption of its ways. There we see a race each family of which seeks its pleasures together as a rule, where the home tie is not enfeebled by the attraction of the wine-shop, where mutual affection softens the roughness

of uneducated minds. Is it not fair to attribute some part of this indoor cohesion to the effect of meals? If a good dinner constitutes an indisputable attraction to ourselves, why should it not produce the same action on our poorer brothers? It does in France. The French peasant stops at home for it just as we do, because he likes it, because home gives him more and better than he can find elsewhere; because being together, young and old, they laugh, and so grow to regard eating as a motive of union, as a time for cheeriness. This aspect of the subject has already been alluded to, but it merits a second mention now, for it supplies extremely important arguments; not that joy at dinner is an exclusive property of the French—we have it too to some extent and under certain conditions—but because with them it is a national feature, consequent not only on their temperament, but also on their wise views of the function which they are discharging, and on the agreeable shape they give to it. We need not despair of some day reaching the same end, by employing the same means, any more than the French should doubt of acquiring our solidity of character if they would but recognise the value of fixed principles, and resolutely set to work to believe in something—God, king, or each other. Their economy in the kitchen is another

enviable quality, for it shows us how calculating prudence can be applied without entailing the too distinct sentiment of privation; how cheapness and satisfaction can be combined; how a useful lesson can be enforced each day without assuming the form of punishment. In England economy is almost always nasty; in France it frequently assumes a character so cunning and artistic, that it loses its repulsive physiognomy, and indeed sometimes acquires a sort of charm, in consequence of the infinite skill with which it is administered, and of the admiration which that skill provokes. A third result of the French system is that it necessitates, or at all events insensibly produces, an almost universal power of home usefulness amongst the women. It expands their *rôle* in life, it creates for them a special duty, it teaches them that wise truth which most of them so clearly recognise and so cordially practise, that no indoor detail is beneath a woman's care; it further develops in them the handiness, the adroit fingering which have become distinctive of the modern Frenchwoman. Such results as these are well worth working for; and though there are exceptions amongst our neighbours, though they sometimes have as wretched homes as we can show, the rule incontestably is, that their working classes know no misery like ours. Their

system of eating enters for a large part into the explanation of this fact.

The association of these moral consequences with most attractive material satisfactions gives to French eating a special place in actual civilisation. Progress may improve it to a still higher form, other nations may grow to it hereafter; but, in the present condition of the world, nothing equal to it can be found elsewhere; and it has the admirable character of being in no way the privilege of a class: it is the common property of the entire people; it can be appreciated and applied by all, from top to bottom of the scale. The one condition of its use is to wish to use it.

CHAPTER V.

MANNERS.

THIS is not a propitious moment to talk about French manners, for it is difficult to disassociate manners from character, and French character has not come out successfully from the bitter tests to which it has been subjected by the events of the last two years. But, in considering the main features of home life in France, manners cannot be omitted: they occupy too important a place to allow us to pass them over: however delicate, however thorny be the task, it cannot be avoided. To postpone it would be useless; to attempt it now is rash, and perhaps even unfair. Still, rashness may be faced; while, with care and honesty, it is not impossible to guard against injustice. We may attain the latter end by extending our examination of the question over the last twenty years, instead of limiting it to actual facts: in that way we may reach an average on which we can more or less rely, and shall, at all events, avoid the

exceptional arguments which a study of purely contemporaneous history might provoke. And yet, even then, we cannot ignore the fact that, as national manners are a result of national dispositions, as they are a national manifestation of national tendencies and thought, they must be regarded with some mistrust and some suspicion, if character—the source they spring from—should be found wanting in times of supreme trial. Whatever be our sympathies for France, whatever be our admiration of the great qualities of its people, whatever be our desire to believe that certain present aspects of their nature are but temporary, we cannot force ourselves to ignore those aspects; no bandage which friendship and goodwill can tie before our eyes can shut out the glare of their shortcomings now; no effort of affection, no allowance for special provocation, can blind us to the moral and political defects which the France of 1871 has wilfully exposed to the gaze of Europe, and consequently, in some degree at least, to the bearing of those defects on an appreciation of its manners.

It can scarcely be seriously urged that manners involve a purely social, surface question, and are unaffected by the deeper principles of action which guide nations as a whole: even the most frivolous of women would hesitate to define them as a merely external form; consciously or unconsciously they

would own that the roots of manners lie far away below the outside habits of daily life; while all serious thinkers will acknowledge that they are an essential and individual property of races, and that they serve to indicate the various interior dispositions of those races just as form and colour constitute the apparent distinctive marks which characterise each organic and inorganic object round us. It is this great truth which renders it so difficult to discuss French manners at a moment such as this. And this is not the only obstacle in the way: prejudice and comparison with our own customs may lead us to one opinion; the seeming evidence of what we take to be facts and consequences may conduct us to another; personal preferences and attachments may incline us towards a third. In such a maze of contradictory elements, safety—if any there be—lies solely in a strict pursuit of what looks like truth; and even then, with all the exactness and all the prudence which it is possible to employ, we may get radically wrong in the result.

One consolation—though it is scarcely the right word to employ in such a case—is, that the French themselves are, just now, as incompetent as we are to determine their condition with certainty and precision. But we, at all events, have the advantage of impartiality. We seek no satisfaction in

the dissection of their ways; we have no pride to gratify, no faults to hide, no excuses to invoke; the matter has no direct influence upon us. We have but one object, and that a fair one; we want instruction, and we try to take it from the French, because they offer it to us in a shape which we do not find elsewhere. This motive may, perhaps, legitimise the rashness which was just now alluded to; this end may, perhaps, excuse the effort to analyse French manners in the midst of the greatest crisis to which any modern nation has been exposed. It is, however, an attempt in which partial failure is almost certain, and in the realisation of which every assertion and every argument must be accompanied by the reservations and the restrictions which the nature and the position of the subject imperiously impose.

And it is the more essential to begin by these expressions of hesitation, because we cannot confine the discussion to any particular class of manners; if it be undertaken at all, it must touch upon all which is most striking in what we see. We cannot restrict it to details of social intercourse, or to mere forms of courtesy and of worldly *convenances*. If we did so, we should fall into the very error against which we have been arguing, and should deprive the subject of nearly all its teaching. The conduct of French people in

society, or at visits, or at balls, is but a small part of the question; its real interest lies in the nature of their habitual attitude towards each other in the current relationship of life, in the product of that attitude on the nation as a whole, in the indications which it affords of the causes which bring it about. The study is perhaps less difficult than it at first appears, because the French are generally so demonstrative that they supply ample ground for observation, and do not hide away what we are looking for; but it is far from easy, and can only be approached with the avowal that it will be incompletely made, especially within the limits of the few pages of a chapter.

The first great feature of French manners, the one which strikes new-comers most, is incontestably the form in which the influence of women is exerted. That influence is by no means universal in its action: at home it is very powerful, but, in this generation, it rarely reaches out of doors. Woman's reign is almost absolute within the four walls of a drawing-room, it is undisputed in family direction and in the management of children; but the cases are rare indeed where it extends to public questions of any kind. The French woman is essentially a woman; her objects are almost always feminine; she does not seek

to go beyond her sphere; she understands her mission as one of duty in her house and of attraction towards the world; she is generally very ignorant of politics and of all dry subjects, and shrinks from any active part in their discussion. Of course there are exceptions by the thousand, but the rule is that she voluntarily abstains from interference in outside topics, whatever be their gravity or their importance. She may have a vague opinion on such matters, picked up from hearing men talk around her, but the bent of her nature leads her in other ways; her tendency is towards things which satisfy her as a woman. It naturally follows that men do not give her what she does not seem to want. They consult her on matters of mutual interest, they ask for and often follow her advice in business; but, in nine cases out of ten, no husband would allow his wife to tell him how to vote at an election, or what form of government to support. This distinction is infinitely more remarkable in France than any analogous condition would be in England, because of the existence there of several rivals to the throne, and of the consequent splitting up of the entire nation into adherents of each pretender. Yet even this exceptional position does not induce Frenchwomen to become politicians. Some few of them

of course are so, and fling themselves with ardour into the cause they have adopted; but, fortunately for the tranquillity of their homes, the greater part of them have wisdom enough to comprehend that their real functions on the earth are of another kind. The exceptions are mainly found amongst Legitimists, who are small in number but resolute in conviction; and Republicans, who, though fewer still, are infinitely more rabid.

This abdication of interference with the destinies of their country, this frank abandonment of questions which, in our present state of civilisation, are supposed, theoretically at all events, to be under the control of men, enable Frenchwomen to acquire special force in the direction of those elements of life which pertain essentially to their sex. As a compensation for the restrictions which they accept on one side, they receive autocratic privileges on the other; but they use those privileges generously and well, for the greater good of their generation. They do not attempt to avowedly work out intellectual or moral ends—their acknowledged aspirations seldom take that form; but they do seek to soften and to gild—to govern by charm and by attraction—to win men to their firesides by the bribe of elegance, of gaiety, and refinement—to tempt them away from other tempters by the satisfaction of their higher tastes and of their better

natures. Organised as society is now, women can scarcely find a more useful part than this to play; it lies well within their means of action; it is exactly suited to the habitual shape of their ambition; it is the true *rôle* of a wife, a mother, and a lady.

Feeling thoroughly the nature and the object of the functions which she undertakes, the Frenchwoman applies her whole energies to their discharge. She knows that she is, above all, a civiliser, and she employs her utmost vigour, her full invention, to attain her end. She surrounds herself with every help which can contribute to the result she seeks; she calls both truth and fiction to her aid. Stimulated by her vanity, lured on to new attempts by the recollection of past successes, she insensibly converts her drawing-room into a theatre in which she is the great actress. And who shall blame her? Who shall presume to cast the first stone at her? In what lies her sin? Let us ask ourselves, honestly if we can, what the world needs from its women; let us put aside our own fancies and our own habits for a moment; let us forget our prejudices while we try to judge; let us look at this case as the French themselves do. And if there be any among us who can go further still, let them lift their measurement to the highest social use of women, and test them by the pleasure they in-

duce. We are not talking of pure duties here—we are not considering the abstract side of life; we are contemplating only its external aspects for the moment, though presently we will try to recognise what these aspects hide. No fair observer will accuse a Frenchwoman simply because she pleases: jealousy and envy may stoop to such an argument as that, but experience leads us to acknowledge that that very faculty is the most admirable which a woman can possess. Where the right of criticism comes in is in the examination of the means by which she pleases: there we have our full privilege of commentary. Those means are open to discussion by all Europe, on the one condition that we state them truly. And such a discussion is particularly in its place here; for the manners of a country offer no element more important than the composition of the measures which women employ in order to maintain their influence and hold their ground.

No one who has any knowledge of the form which modern life assumes will dispute the fact that, in all European countries, men go less and less into society, and seek their satisfactions more and more away from drawing-rooms. This is as true of England as it is of France; but French women struggle more resolutely than ours do against the growing danger. They see instinct-

ively that if it goes on developing as it has done during the last twenty years, there will come, some day, a thorough dislocation of the bond which, until new temptations rose, held women and men together in the pursuit of mutual enjoyment. With the practical judgment which is one of their high merits, many of them have set to work to fight against outside competition. They have not contented themselves with lifting up their hands and mourning over the decadence of men: pluckily, and with a will, they have accepted battle, and are carrying it on with all the weapons they can forge. Let us bear this well in mind during our examination of the nature of those weapons, and of the uses to which they are put; for, in such cases, it may not unreasonably be urged that the end justifies the means.

The word coquetry expresses inexactly and insufficiently the attitude of the Frenchwoman at her fireside; there is as much of pure nature in it as there is of art; and, furthermore, the word coquetry needs interpretation. To most of us it conveys the idea of the direct pursuit of admiration or of love, and of the calculated use of all the artifices which may seem to serve that object. That is the meaning we should find in dictionaries, and it is the right one to apply to the majority. But to those who have tunnelled through the

coquetry of certain Frenchwomen, and have closely examined its geology, the word becomes susceptible of a far higher sense; for it then comes out that, in not unfrequent examples, it implies the defence of general rights and privileges, rather than the desire of personal successes. It is for this, in a considerable degree, that many Frenchwomen wilfully attract, that they persistently seek to charm. For them victory lies in winning men away from other allurements, in reconstituting what was once society, in reasserting the undisputed supremacy of their sex as the true source of joy. When this is the prize of the strife, the coquetry of Frenchwomen becomes impersonal; their blandishments are not intended to vanquish you for themselves, but to entice you to a system which they essentially represent, to a theory of which they are the incarnation. If we admit such a point of view as this—and in many cases it is the right one — coquetry becomes a merit, seductive wiles assume the character of honest combat, insidious temptations acquire the aspect of justifiable attacks. It is not so always: the mass seek simply to draw homage to themselves, without caring one atom about the royalty of their sex. But for either category, especially for the latter, the position is surrounded by grave dangers. Frenchwomen are often fingering two-edged swords, they are often

risking their fluttering wings against the flame they fan; and even if the heart remains unattacked, even if duty or pre-existing love should cover it with an impenetrable breastplate, vanity at all events has no defence, and takes naturally to itself the glory of every triumph gained, even if it be for the common cause. These perils are manifestly grave, but the consciousness of their existence sits lightly enough on natures which are accustomed to them. Frenchwomen do not admit that, at the best, their lives are often passed in narrow escapes: they are blinded by long habit. In one sense it is as well that this should be so, for they could not possibly attain the brilliant temerity which they exhibit if the neighbouring precipice were always before their eyes. As for satisfied vanity, most of them rather like it; they take it as a recompense for their labour, as a solace for their devotion to a cause; they have their own approval, and that comforts them. The same might be said of other women besides the French.

But where the real *femme du monde* is unrivalled outside France is in the admirable dexterity, the catlike grace, the consummate intelligence with which she wields her arms. Concentrated in her "manners" all the varied elements of her coquetry come out. Her every bow is critically measured according to the person to whom it is addressed,

and the effect which it is intended to produce. From the low, slow, sweeping curtsey with which, on a first introduction, she salutes a woman of rank higher than her own, through the long, delicately-graduated scale of forms of recognition, down to the familiar nod and extended hand with which, without rising from her sofa-corner, she greets her male friends, each movement implies a thought, each variation telegraphs a meaning, each shade suggests the nature of the reply which she expects. The way in which the proffered hand is held tells you unmistakably whether you ought respectfully to press it or reverently to kiss it; the fashion in which the head turns towards you as you come in, the quantity and the quality of the smile, say, as distinctly as if it were printed in large letters, "Tell me I am charming," or, "I don't care what you think," or anything between these two extremes. The underlying wish can be expressed, the secret object can be shown, the exact degree of permitted intimacy can be indicated —all by manner. In their mastery of this unfathomable science, Frenchwomen possess a power which scarcely any other than themselves can even comprehend. They well know the strength it gives them, and they mature it with the profoundest care. It would, however, be a great error to suppose that this power is all acquired—that it is

nothing but a fruit of long-studied, well-developed coquetry: the better sort of Frenchwoman is born to it, it comes to her with her mother's milk, it is in her nature—all she does is to reinforce it by the arts and aids which experience successively places at her disposal. The rapid play of physiognomy, the trembling of the eyebrows and of the corners of the mouth, the twisting of the shoulders, the nervous oratory of the fingers, the suggestive movements of the feet, all these forms of speech—for such they are—belong to her by right of birth; she does but regulate their expression. With such infinite and varied language at her disposal she is not obliged to open her lips to speak: ideas and sentiments and desires pour out of her without words; her manner is half her eloquence.

But they are not all like this. As with most other products, they have their categories, their classes, their degrees. Thus far we have looked only at the highest types, at the most perfected examples; below them stretch away vast areas of decreasing skill, of lessening charm, ending in the bottom strata, with the worst form of contrary development. Awkwardness, stupidity, and vulgarity can be found in France in masses: those unattractive attributes exist there in lamentable abundance; but it is a peculiarity of the country that they do not necessarily depend

on rank, or even on education; they appear to be as instinctive in their victims as are the brilliant properties we have been roughly sketching in the luckier individuals who possess them. Manner can be to a great extent acquired: it may be copied, it may be struggled for, it may be put on as if it were a dress; but to be absolutely complete in its working out it must be innate in its origin. And yet, true as this may be, the French enjoy a singular facility, so proper to themselves that it may be regarded as a monopoly, which enables them partially to compensate for indigenous insufficiency. They have the faculty of imitation. To take one example which is familiar to us all, what can be more striking than the manners of the Paris shop-girls as a whole? It cannot surely be pretended that they are all born with the tone they reach. Many of them must be so, for we see amongst them such admirable types that they can only be explained by indwelling tendencies and natural dispositions; but the greater part of them pick up, by nothing but contact and adaptation, the external characteristics which generally belong to their superiors. Of course they do not climb beyond conventionalities of mere form—they do not attain to the supreme subtleties which are found only on the topmost round of the high ladder which leads to perfection as it is understood in

France; but they scramble to an altitude which suffices amply to enable them to please us; they show us what can be done by copying, and they seem thereby to prove that, amongst their countrywomen, absence of reasonably good manners should rather be attributed to a personal incapacity for appreciating them than to any absolute impossibility of acquiring them. This explanation, if it be a right one, would lead us to suppose that there may almost be a sort of preference for vulgarity in certain minds, and that its existence is a consequence of free election rather than of incurable deficiencies. However extravagant such a proposition may look at first, there is probably some truth in it; for, otherwise, it would be difficult to explain how it is that, with all the means of improvement which are at their disposal, there should be so many vulgar women in France, and especially, why they should carry their vulgarity to the prodigious pitch they often reach. It is possible that the very excessiveness of their national capacity in one direction provokes a violent recoil the other way if that capacity is not wisely guided; and that the same feline ways, the same ardent demonstrativeness, which aid a French lady to compose her admirable manner, are distorted into exaggerated coarseness in cases where the sentiment of their right uses does not exist. This

does not tell us, however, why that sentiment should be absent in some natures and present in others; but as we are not likely to be able to find any answer to such a question, we had better prudently leave it alone; it is beyond our ken.

Between those two extremes lie the average women of France. They are generally agreeable, sometimes rather *maniérées* and pretentious, sometimes very simple and unaffected, rarely shy or timid. A total self-possession, a calm indifference which looks as if it sprang from long experience of the world, but which, ordinarily, is produced by the habit of other people which they acquire in childhood, are their great features. They go in and out of a crowded room, they receive a dozen strangers, they talk, they laugh, with an appearance of unconsciousness which renders it difficult to suppose that they are coquetting; and yet a vast number of them are acting on a tiny scale, though without any special object beyond a vague desire to please. The necessity of attracting is in the Gallic blood: it may be controlled by the deep sentiment of one absorbing duty; it may be temporarily suppressed by other more urgent needs; it may be modified in its expression by the thousand accidents of position: but it is at the bottom of all Frenchwomen's hearts, though it shows itself in so many varied forms that it is not always

easy to recognise it. There is something which strangely influences men in the idea that almost every woman they meet wishes to make them like her; there is an unseen flattery in such a thought, but its action is none the less real because it is not evident to the eye. The woman, often half unconsciously, conveys to the man the notion that it would be agreeable to her to be made love to, partly as a pastime, partly as a homage which is due to her: the man knows, nineteen times out of twenty, that he will be forgotten directly his back is turned, and that some one else will take his place with identically the same result; but that certainty does not prevent his doing what is more or less expected from him during the quarter of an hour he is there. So the two go on, for no harm's sake at all, and a week afterwards one says that Monsieur X is an agreeable man, and the other that Madame Z is a charming woman. Within limits such as these—and in the immense majority of cases this is all which happens—the French system has great merits: it stimulates grace of language, it provokes expression, it brings out courtesy and good manners, and it offers a powerful antidote to the poisons which are working on most men's minds from the opposite direction.

The measures employed to attain these ends have been alluded to already in general terms;

we will now try to specify some of them more exactly, so as to see as clearly as a few examples will permit, how French manners are composed. Here, however, we must cease to talk of women by themselves—we must look at men as well; for, though their side of the subject is less attractive, it makes up half the whole. And we must descend into certain trivial details, into trifling forms and habits, otherwise the sketch would give outline without shading. It may seem useless or absurd to gravely state that, at a dinner-party, the lady of the house is the first to leave the drawing-room and heads the procession to the table: but even in such a fact as that there is a meaning; it shows that, in French eyes, she is on her own ground, and therefore merits the homage which is due to every woman in her right place. The husband, on the contrary, comes last, because, as a man, his duty is to yield precedence to everybody he receives. When dinner is finished every one returns in the self-same order, arm in arm, the mistress and her cavalier first; the husband and his companion bring up the rear. And why do all come back at once, straight into the drawing-room? Why is there no separation of the sexes, no division into male and female talk? Because the women will not have it; the men obey them, not unwillingly, indeed, but because they find it pleas-

anter. In many houses, especially in Paris, even the excuse of smoking is not allowed to divide the guests; cigars are lighted in the drawing-room—the very women offer matches, so determined are they that men shall not abandon them. And, after all, this is right in principle: the objection to tobacco is only personal; and whenever its smell is not insupportable to themselves, women show sound wisdom in momentarily suppressing the objection that a drawing-room is not a place to smoke in. But whatever be the concessions which she makes in order to fulfil her first duty of keeping society together, no Frenchwoman who respects herself will permit concessions to degenerate into liberty. No Frenchman will dream of showing less deference to the women round him, or of less strictly observing forms, because he is allowed to smoke in the company of diamonds and white dresses. In questions of this sort the French show remarkable tact. Impertinent and *entreprenants* (there is no English word for that) as they often are with women that they do not know, they rarely attempt to profit by the familiarities which the modern system of life permits amongst people who meet on a footing of recognised equality. On both sides there is a sentiment of measure and propriety which is not often forgotten; the result is, that cigars authorise no licence, that natural *abandon*

produces no disrespect. The material attitudes of the men prove this: there is no lolling about, no carelessness of position, no neglect of the observances which are habitually practised in the presence of women. And yet there is but little ceremony in our meaning of the word. The people do not sit straight, they do not forbid themselves to move, immobility is not supposed to be *comme il faut*—quite the contrary; there is a perpetual shifting of the body, especially of the arms and legs—a constant adaptation of physical action to the ideas which are being expressed—an unceasing working of the features. All this gives singular animation to French society, but it is all regulated by the unwritten code which fixes "manners." The absence of self-imposed restraint creates a freedom of which we have no idea; but the presence of courtesies which no one would be permitted to neglect, maintains a politeness which we but rarely attain. Who ever saw a wooden Frenchwoman? She may sometimes be ungainly, but she is always thoroughly alive. Even her affectations do not become namby-pamby; the sentiment of vitality is all over her, it leaps out in everything she does; but with all her vehemence of movement she never forgets that she is a woman, and never fails to exact what is due to her as a woman.

There are, however, many details of life, or

rather of customs, in which feminine action is not specially expressed. Such are, for instance, amongst others, the announcements of deaths and marriages. In these there is no distinction of the sexes. The circulars which are sent round to all acquaintances (newspaper advertisements are not employed in France for such ends as these) contain, in one case, the names of the father and mother, if they be alive, and in the other, those of all relations, to the third degree. A *billet de faire part*, as these documents are called, is couched in invariable language, whatever be the position of the senders. For a marriage it always says, in inverted duplicate—"Monsieur and Madame A. have the honour to inform you of the marriage of their son, M. Charles A., with Mademoiselle Julie B." And in another sheet—"Monsieur and Madame B. have the honour to inform you of the marriage of their daughter, Mademoiselle Julie B., with M. Charles A." If you are invited to the wedding, the two printed notes contain the additional sentence—"and beg you to be present at the nuptial benediction, which will be given to them in such a church on such a day." For a funeral the shape is different; the *billet* is in this form: "You are begged to be present at the funeral-service and burial of M. N., who died on the 9th instant, at the age of fifty years, after receiving the

sacraments of the Church, which will take place on the 11th instant, in the church of ——, his parish, at eleven o'clock precisely. From M. A., Madame B.," and so on through twenty, thirty, or forty names, as the case may be, "his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, second cousins," and various other forms of connection. If it be a notification of the death, without an invitation to the ceremony, then the wording is: "M. A., Madame B.," and all the others, "have the honour to inform you of the painful loss which they have sustained in the person of M. N., who died on the 9th instant," &c.; "their son, husband, father, brother," and so on. Births used to be notified in an analogous way, but the practice has been disappearing during the last thirty years, and notice is now rarely given of the arrival of new children. Most people attend the weddings to which they are convoked; everybody goes to funerals; nothing is allowed to stand in the way of the latter duty, which is considered absolutely sacred, as being the last sign of sympathy you can offer. This is why French funerals present such long processions; why several hundred people may often be seen marching bareheaded behind a hearse, to church or to the cemetery. It is a touching custom, and everybody joins in momentarily with

its object, by uncovering as the coffin passes. All these things, however unimportant in themselves, are signs not only of habit but of feeling. They show how much the French associate themselves, externally at least, with each other's joys and sorrows; how every opportunity of demonstration is seized upon and utilised; how the manners of the nation reflect the sentiments which guide it, or which, at least, are supposed to guide it.

The organisation of balls, visits, and receptions is materially the same in France as in other European countries; the form of invitations is the same, but answers to them are somewhat differently composed. The formula usually adopted in reply to an offered dinner is: "M. A. remercie Monsieur et Madame B. de leur gracieuse invitation, et aura l'honneur de s'y rendre." And here, lest the little detail should pass unobserved, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that A., in speaking of himself, writes "M.;" while in mentioning B. and his wife he says, "Monsieur et Madame," at full length. This distinction is invariably employed by men; it is a necessary courtesy. Women on the contrary, always describe themselves as "Madame," without abbreviation. That is a woman's right; it indicates that her sex puts her in a position of superiority; that she has to receive honours, not to offer them.

One of the highest merits of the French system of manners is, that it tacitly lays down the principle that all persons meeting in the same house know each other without the formality of introduction. Any man may ask any girl to dance, or speak to anybody at a private party. This in no way extends to public gatherings, where the guarantee of supposed equality which results from the fact of knowing the same host does not exist. But in drawing-rooms the rule is absolute; everybody may talk to everybody. This is an intelligent and most practical custom; it facilitates conversation; it dispels all awkwardness towards your neighbour; it melts cold natures; it makes it possible to pass a pleasant hour in a house where you do not know a soul; it gives a look of warmth and unity to a room. No one is obliged to sit gloomily and in silence between two repelling strangers. If you want to speak you are sure of a listener. Of course people are often regularly introduced to each other by the master or the mistress, especially at dinner-parties; but in those cases the object is to put a name upon them, not to authorise them to converse; for that act no permission is required. The French have such a need of talk, and, generally, they talk so well, that it is easy to understand how this rule grew up; but the

explanation should not be limited to that one cause. Sociableness is almost as real a necessity for them as chatter is, and the first condition of its practice is that all needless barriers should be suppressed between persons of the same society; so, for this reason too, liberty of acquaintance has been adopted indoors. Its effect on manners, strictly so called, is to polish them still further; for, though you have the indisputable right to begin a conversation with a lady next to you whom you have never seen before, you can only do so on condition of employing the most respectful shades of attitude and language, you cannot jump into intimacy with her, and can only profit by her presence provided you show yourself to be well worthy of it. Between men these obligations are naturally less strict, though they continue to exist in a great degree, and involve the use of courteous forms and of much more ceremony than is necessary between previous friends. The principle which temporarily equalises all the people who are united under the same roof has other applications besides this one. It is a consequence of the self-same theory which obliges men to raise their hats when they enter a railway carriage, or an omnibus, or a waiting-room, or a shop, or any covered place where they find other

people. It is the same feeling which leads them to bow respectfully to every lady they may encounter upon a staircase; and if she does not return the courtesy, you may be sure from that single fact that she is not a Frenchwoman. These acts, and others like them, are very civilising; they add much grace to life; they induce external consideration and respect for others; the style in which they are executed gives you an instantaneous and generally correct idea of the entire manners of the performer. This brings us to that infinitely grave question—a Frenchman's bow.

There are many theories on this deep subject; there have been many professors of the noble science of salutation; there are, even in these degenerate days, differences of opinion as to the exact nature and ordination of the movements which compose a bow; but the generally adopted practice of the best modern school is after this wise. When you meet a lady that you know, you begin, four yards off, by calmly raising your outside arm, right or left, as the case may be. There must be no precipitation in the movement, and the arm must be maintained at a certain distance from the body, with a sort of roundness in its curve and motion; that is, it must not come up too direct, and especially not too fast. When the hand arrives at the

level of the hat rim, it must seize it lightly, slightly, with about half the length of the fingers; it must slowly lift the hat, and slowly carry it out in air to the fullest length of the gradually-extended straightened arm; but not in front, it must go out sideways, horizontally from the chest, and on a level with the shoulder; this part of the operation must last several seconds. Simultaneously the hat must be turned over, by a calculated gradual movement, in exact proportion with the progress of its passage through the atmosphere, so that, starting perpendicularly with the crown upwards, it may describe a complete semicircle on its road, and reach the extreme limit of its distance at the precise instant when it has become upside down, and the lining gazes at the skies. At the instant when the hat is lifted from the head, the body begins to slightly bend, the inflection being so organised that the full extent of curving of the spine shall be attained concurrently with the greatest distance of the hat. A slight respectful smile is contemporaneously permitted to flicker furtively about the corners of the mouth. Then the hat comes slowly sweeping back again, its inward motion presenting the exact inverse of its outward journey; the back grows straight once more, the smile disappears, the hat resumes its accustomed place, the bow is over, the face grows grave, and you, the author of that

noble act, murmur within yourself, "I think I did that rather well." But, if the lady should stop to speak to you (she alone can determine whether conversation shall take place out of doors), you remain bareheaded; the arm is slowly dropped till the now forgotten hat hangs vacantly against the knee; the back continues somewhat bent; and when the talk is over—when, with a half-curtsey and an inclination of the head, the lady trips away—the bending of the body becomes profound, the hat starts off once more to the full distance which the arm can cover, but at a rather lower altitude than before, it executes a majestic, radiating sweep through space, and then goes on to the hair, and all is over. Written description renders the whole process somewhat absurd, but the impression is very different when the act itself is contemplated. Modern manners offer scarcely any form of deference so grand, so thorough, so striking in its effect as a really well-executed bow. English people are rarely able to judge it rightly, for their notions and practices on the subject take so different a form that the Frenchman seems to them to exaggerate ridiculously when he superbly waves his hat all round him; but, on the other hand, the British fashion of salute is miserable and contemptible in Gallic eyes, and is, especially, utterly inexpressive of the courtesy and the homage which

men ought to manifest towards women. In France the very boys know how to bow; and though the nation exhibits every sort of degree of capacity in the matter, from the highest to the lowest, the dogma that bowing is a really important function is believed in almost everywhere.

The children are generally well-mannered; they are seldom rough or boisterous; their almost constant contact with their mothers and their mothers' friends gives them, from their babyhood, a glimmering of the sort of voice and attitude which ought to be adopted before strangers. There are exceptions in any quantity; vulgar parents usually make vulgar offspring, but the mass of boys and girls—particularly the latter—are well-behaved, and do not show stupidity or *mauvaise honte* when spoken to. One of the great causes of the ease with which, as a whole, the French act towards each other, lies in this early training. A boy of ten knows perfectly that if his father meets a lady in the street, and stops to speak to her, his own duty is to take his hat off and to stand bareheaded. He knows that it would be rude to shake hands with anybody, man or woman, without uncovering; his mother tells him, his father sets him the example, so it seems quite natural to him; he does it simply, without loutishness or shyness. In the same way he learns to be cool and self-collected even if any-

thing occurs which draws attention to him in a crowd. If he drops his book at church and has to leave his place to pick it up, he does not blush—he sees no reason why he should. The girls do not giggle and look foolish if their hair comes down or their hat falls off; they rearrange themselves with perfect calm and self-possession, utterly unconscious that any one is looking at them, and indifferent if they know it. From these early habits they grow up to regard all ordinary movements as being permissible in public. This is why a Frenchwoman takes off her bonnet and smoothes her hair before the glass in a railway waiting-room or a restaurant, or regulates her skirts, or puts in order her baby's inmost clothes before fifty people. In her eyes all such things are so natural, so matter of course, that she has no kind of motive for making any fuss about them; she does them just as if she were at home,—and she is right. The advantage of being educated with views of this sort is immense; the views themselves are wise and practical, and their realisation has a marked effect on the development of simplicity and naturalness in manners.

As for the indoor tone of families—that is to say, the behaviour of their members towards each other—it is hardly necessary to say that it varies in France, as it does everywhere else, with their social position and with the quantity of affection

which unites them. No law can be laid down in such a case, no general principle can apply to the infinite shades of conduct which exist amongst thirty-seven millions of people. As a rule, the love of home is universal amongst the French, and it provokes a good deal of harmony and gentleness; but that is all that can be said with truth. To pretend that, as an entire nation, they exhibit delicacy, courtesy, and politeness towards each other, in their intimate relations, would be an evident and needless exaggeration; but to recognise that the prevalence of warm attachment between persons of the same kin induces consideration for each other, and consequently softens the average of manners, is reasonable and just. The French are essentially a loving race; they are emotional and demonstrative; it would be therefore contrary to the probabilities which result from those two facts if they were found to be hard and harsh, or even negligent, in their home attitude. Their usual disposition is to seek to give pleasure, and they manifest the desire, wherever it exists, by tenderness of form, by exactness of attention, by mutual forbearance. There is much respect towards parents, much expansion towards old friends, much sympathy in joy and sorrow. The sterling old British theory that the French are "superficial" and "so insincere," is utterly false of their home life. Even

as regards the ordinary relations of men and women, it would be difficult to show that they are less sincere than those of other nations round them; but indoors you see them as they are, warm-hearted, affectionate, with all their feelings on the surface. So far anybody can look on and form his own opinion; but where observation fails in nearly all of us is in small detail, in delicate distinctions, in differences of degree, which often are only recognisable after long contact, and, even more, after acquiring, by that contact, the power of just appreciation. Many of us are incapable of judging questions such as these, because we do not possess the faculty of perception; others, more numerous still, need time and teaching to enable us to detect the finer shades of meaning which are conveyed by manners which are new to us. Their language is at first imperceptible and impalpable: by degrees it becomes distinct; a habit of it forms itself within us; it assumes a more and more attractive guise; until at last, by long experience, we grow to like and cordially to admire what, in the origin, we either could not see, or, if we saw it, disliked and disapproved. It would be folly to attempt to define, by verbal description, the thousand trifles which compose this element of manners; it cannot be passed over without allusion, but no attempt to handle it in writing could possibly succeed.

It is more easy to deal with palpable facts, and to say that, as a rule, the French do not dress regularly for dinner as we do; that pleasant habit is limited to a very few houses. Notwithstanding the great and sudden increase of wealth during the last twenty years, and the consequent large augmentation of the class which could dress if it chose to do so, the old system of frock-coats and dusty boots remains in force, little fitted as it is to the smart furniture and gilded walls of modern rooms, and little as it corresponds to the usually pretty toilets of the women. On that point we beat the French; but they get ahead of us again in their constant and precise observance of courteous customs towards acquaintances. Every departing visitor is accompanied, if it be a woman, to the drawing-room door by the mistress, and to the outer door by the master or his son; if it be a man, the lady of the house does not pursue him, but her husband does. No one is transferred to the care of servants, or abandoned to his own resources to find his way out as best he can. They offer us a good model, too, in deference towards old people, and especially in the form in which that deference is manifested. Again, they are far away our masters in the courtesies of language and in the infinite dexterity and readiness of their compliments. Their *esprit* is so full of *à propos* that

they are rarely baffled by a difficulty; they twist out of an uncertain position by a well-imagined phrase. This may be illustrated by an example. The old Duc de Doudeauville (better known in Charles X.'s time as Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld) was a type of the *grandes manières d'autrefois.* He was a superb specimen of a gentleman, and was looked upon as almost the last representative of the great school of manners which faded away with legitimate royalty. He was slowly coming downstairs one afternoon from a visit, when he met a youngster of twenty, bounding up, three steps at a time, to the drawing-room which he had just quitted. Both stopped short. The Duke, by right of age, stood against the wall; the boy, four stairs below him, stood against the bannisters. Both bowed low, both were bareheaded, neither would pass the other. "Je vous en prie, monsieur," said the Duke, waving his hat towards the first floor. "Jamais, Monsieur le Duc," replied the other. So they might have stopped till now (this happened in 1855), if, after the fifth or sixth invitation from the old gentleman, the young one had not solved the difficulty by an inspiration. With a smile, and bending to his knees, he stepped up, saying, "J'obéis, Monsieur le Duc; l'obéissance est le premier devoir de la jeunesse." That is what the French call "saving the honour of the flag;" but

it is not everybody, even in France, who would have invented the solution. This story shows how close is the connection between manners and language, and how difficult it is to be complete in one without thorough command of the other. The best manners may be paralysed by want of words; there are positions from which they alone cannot extricate, and which need a ready tongue as well as graceful physical action. This element of the subject must, however, be considered by itself; the influence of language is too large a question to be discussed incidentally.

The attitude of French men towards each other is a separate subject; it presents, on the whole, a different character from that assumed by the women, or by society in its mixed nature. There is a good deal of the same varnish, of the same veneering, of the same external courtesies, especially between slight acquaintances; but, as the object is not the same, as the desire to please does not exist between men as it does between the sexes, it follows, naturally enough, that there is less reality, and consequently less sincerity. Here the old accusation of wilful sham which has been so often brought against French manners is well founded; for the men adopt in their mutual relations a series of forms apparently indicative of respect, of sympathy, of deference, while no such feelings, nor

anything approaching to them, are in their hearts. And though this same charge applies, in less degree, to other people than the French; though some sort of falseness is inevitable in that part of our conduct towards each other which we call manners; though, after all, no one is deceived by mere seeming signs, because every one is well aware that they cover no solid substance, these signs are so developed in France, they occupy so large a place there in the outside of life, they constitute so striking a feature of the national aspect, that the contradiction between what they seem to be, and what we know they are, becomes particularly glaring. This contradiction assumes more importance still when it is measured by the moral results by which it is now surrounded. The considerations which were indicated at the commencement of this chapter assert themselves with special force when they are applied to men alone. In women we are tempted to excuse frivolity, and surface pleasantness, and the shallowness of ceremony. In them those insufficiencies are perhaps inherent to the part they play; and, furthermore, they atone largely for them by fascination, and by the solid service which they render in struggling, by every means, to hold society together. But for men none of these excuses can be invoked. Men represent other objects, other duties: men consti-

tute the nation, in its public sense; and if we find the nation palpably demoralised — not only without principles or convictions, but almost without opinions—we are justified in regarding men, in this question of manners, with a suspicion that we do not extend to women. If everything else in France stood on a solid basis, if religious faith were even general, if political convictions existed for other than individual purposes, if there were such a feeling as mutual respect, if we could perceive the great moral ties which hold a nation together, then it might be fairly urged that the sham of excessive courtesy between men is a valueless exception, and that the regular practice of public virtues and the recognised community of action for great ends take away all importance from it. But we see, or think we see, that, on the contrary, the sham of what we call exaggerated manners is but part of an entire system of unreality, in which professions almost everywhere supply the place of acts; in which duty, self-sacrifice, and earnestness are nearly undiscoverable qualities. This is why we are forced to ask ourselves, unwillingly enough, if there be not absolute harm in what we might otherwise regard as only an attractive weakness; this is why the manners of the men of France may possibly deserve to be classed amongst their national defects.

This, however, is such delicate ground, the faculty of appreciating its nature and its dangers varies so widely with the accidents of position and of personal prejudice and experience, that it cannot be approached without excessive precautions, or without reserving for everybody the fullest right of difference of view. It is but an opinion—one opinion—that can be expressed here: that opinion may be totally incorrect, but circumstances unhappily seem to justify it. And yet one shrinks from the assertion that a system which contains so much that is winning and pleasant, so much that seems to soften and unite, is really, after all, nothing but rottenness, as so many other French theories have proved themselves to be. If nearly everything had not broken down during the last two years, it would have been easy to defend the ostensible deceits which make up so much of our neighbours' manners. Until 1870, the subject was one of those of which it may be urged that "la forme couvre le fond;" but, with all goodwill and sympathy, that cannot now be said. Absence of conviction seems to be so essential an element of French character to-day, that manners take their place with all the rest, and come in for their share of the mistrust with which we cannot help regarding the entire moral condition of the country. Viewed in this light,

the question loses its special nature—it becomes one of the elements of the whole position, and should be measured by the same rules as we apply to other and graver questions. Where all, or nearly all, is failure — where national action has sunk below the standard which we find elsewhere, and which, allowing for variations of shape and detail, we thought we had thus far found in France itself—the manners of the men cannot be abstracted from the mass; we are forced to take them as one of the external signs of an inner state, not as the special manifestation of pure courtesies. If what has been already said about the closeness of the tie between character and manners is really true—and it is difficult to see how the argument can be disputed—the value of manners necessarily falls with that of character; we cease to be able to consider manners as a distinct and separate subject, depending on itself alone. The women we can put aside; they have their uses and their purpose: we can also admit and approve the studied deference which the men generally show towards women, for it may be taken as the evidence of justifiable and even necessary or useful homage: it is when we look at the men alone that the difficulty stands out in all its force. When men, after bowing to the ground, and

employing all the delicacies of speech and compliment, all the flatteries of form, abuse each other directly they have parted, they can scarcely expect lookers-on to regard them or their manners with much confidence now that their other public doings partake of the same illogical unreality. It is almost refreshing to observe—and the fact should be insisted on as a hopeful sign —that in certain cases, simplicity, naturalness, and even a shade of roughness, are coming into use, as if the better class of minds no longer consent to go on shamming. Ceremony is still the rule, the almost universal rule, but exceptions are creeping out; and without defending for one instant the adoption of indifference or coldness, or the complete abandonment of the elaborate forms which once constituted great manners, it may at all events be suggested that the particular position of France at this moment does authorise, amongst the men, a lessening of the practice of general deceptions towards each other.

The whole moral interest of the matter lies in this part of it. Even if the manners of the women are open to some criticism, from the higher points of view, at all events it may be urged that they are not really more illusory than they are elsewhere, and that any blame which they may deserve is merited about equally in

other countries. But excessive courtesies between men who neither like nor respect each other are, in this generation, peculiar to France, and it is difficult to invent an argument in their defence. Why are such courtesies put on? What are they intended to express? What real meaning do they hide? Of course it may be said, and with much truth, that such exaggerations are not universal; but it cannot be denied that they exist as an ordinary rule amongst educated persons, and that foreigners have the right to look at them as constituting a normal habit amongst the better classes. That being so, do we go too far in thinking, that the sooner the better classes abandon mere forms, which may now be classed amongst other useless deceits, the sooner will they begin, so far as this particular evidence of their character is concerned, to grow towards reality and principle? There was a time when mere forms were a necessary element of polished education; but the entire organisation of society has become so changed, that no argument of necessity can be invoked in our time. People are now free to be themselves; there are still abundant laws which regulate the conditions of our contact with each other; but as those laws are everywhere drifting towards naturalness and simplicity, the maintenance of meaningless cere-

mony can no longer be defended. And yet it can scarcely be expected that a manifest change of manners will be one of the consequences produced by the recent disasters of France. If those disasters had brought about results in other and graver questions, we might speculate on the effects which they might be expected to induce in this comparatively trifling detail of pure forms. But as, so far as we can see, France has "forgotten nothing and learnt nothing" since the summer of 1870, it would be absurd to suppose that any real change will arise in the external fashions of its men.

For the women we can scarcely wish for change. When we know them well, when we have grown to them by habit, we cease to feel, or even to perceive, the peculiarities which strike us at first sight; we forget our prejudices, we accept the exaggerations which shocked us when we were new-comers. It is then, and only then, that we can fairly judge or accurately compare; it is then that we become able to appreciate that intensely French thing—"charm;" it is then that we can measure the degrees and sorts of pleasure which the manners of the higher types of French women are capable of provoking. The political condition of a country, however bad it may be, cannot be urged as a motive for the abandonment of graceful courtesies between men and women, or as an argument against the arms which

some French women employ with such singular dexterity. But as against the men alone the situation may be differently viewed: there we may appeal to all our old theories of frankness, sincerity, and honesty, and may, not unfairly, urge that amongst the elements of the moral renovation of which France has so much need, the manners of the men will gain by a return to truth.

Viewing the subject as a whole, and renewing the reservations which have already been expressed, it is evident that there is a marked contradiction between French manners and the moral state which the grace and courtesy of these manners, if they were real, would necessarily imply. But this is in no way a modern fact. Those manners, since they first were formed, have coexisted with the moral defects which we observe to-day; there has been no change in either; French character, French qualities, French shortcomings, have been the same for centuries. Recent events have brought them into vivid light, but those events have not created them. History shows us, if we look at it with that object, that the race has been what it is since Louis Treize was king. The absence of correlation between the inner state and its outward manifestations has existed since manners were invented; there has always been the same polish on the surface, the same absence of convictions under-

neath. This generation inherited the contradiction, and has perpetuated it; the blame which it deserves is limited to that. It found itself in presence of a tradition—a winning, softening tradition—whose entire aspect was agreeable, which was handed onwards by its ancestors as one of the prides of France; it took it, and it kept it, without asking whether it expressed the truth. The question now lies between reality and charm; old habits and old preferences are so strong that charm will probably retain its place, for the whole race must change its nature before it will own that reality is a higher merit still.

CHAPTER VI.

LANGUAGE.

If the nations of the earth were convoked in a universal *plébiscite* in order to determine by their vote what is the most inveterate habit they each possess, the probabilities are that the verdict of the majority would not be in favour of tobacco, or of a particular shape of clothes, or of certain sorts of food, or even of going to bed; but that the inhabitants of the four continents and Australasia would pretty well agree that the custom of their mother tongue is deeper rooted than any other. It is true that native languages may be utterly forgotten; but, in that case, they are replaced by some other dialect of which the use becomes as absolute as if it were the original form of speech. And even in the exceptional cases where several tongues are spoken with almost equal skill, there is always one of them which is unconsciously preferred, which forms the adopted channel of thought;—there is always one in which, though perhaps scarcely

knowing it, we count, swear, and pray. Those three acts constitute the test—they indicate the old habit, the inconscient choice—they betray the origin, or, at all events, the land of education, of the speaker. We may acquire other idioms than our own with such completeness that we think in them when we are using them with other persons; but directly we get into a passion, directly we are alone with our conscience or with figures, we relapse into the one dialect which is essentially our own, and thereby indicate the source of our early teaching. Preferences based upon comparison, if we were free to exercise them, might lead us to use other tongues for these three acts; but there is something in us which stifles choice,—we obey our early habit, even though we recognise that our thought would find better expression in other words.

An influence so subtle, so constant, and so overpowering, can scarcely exist within and around us without affecting something more than the mere words we use; it must surely exercise some action on our character as well. The form in which our ideas are habitually couched, must react, in some degree, on the ideas themselves, so that national differences of language may possibly be admitted as one of the indirect causes of the differences of national character. This fact, however, if fact it be, is essentially modern in its origin and its result:

so long as languages were in process of formation the movement was, of course, the other way; character then directed idiom and gave it life and shape: it is only since each race has acquired a definitely completed form of speech, in which the education of its members is conducted, that the reaction which is here suggested can have grown into existence; it is only since dialects have attained their actual state of relative perfection that they have been able to recoil upon their makers, and to aid in guiding the attitude of their thoughts. The consequences of such a movement (if really it is at work) must necessarily be most felt by populations which talk abundantly, for its power can only spring from use and can only augment by use. As the French are probably the greatest talkers in the universe, it is on them, therefore, that the suggested recoil should be producing its most marked effects. If this theory be true, the French are no longer really masters of their language; on the contrary, their language is tending to become their master, not materially—but morally, not in the forms of phrase they use, but in a partial and hitherto unrecognised subservience of their thinking to those forms. The effect, however, is difficult to seize, and still more difficult to trace throughout its course. Its reality would generally be denied; for people would not like to own that their intelli-

gence is somewhat at the mercy of the words they habitually employ. Every one believes that there is analogy between the character of his nation and of its language—that the former originally formed the latter, and that the one may in some degree be tested by the other; but we are scarcely ready yet to own, that possibly the relation between cause and effect is becoming introverted, and that language is beginning to fashion us as it was once fashioned by our forefathers.

And yet, if we take the subject in its largest aspect; if we consider the influence of language, not only in literature and art, but in politics and history as well; if we acknowledge, as we can scarcely fail to do, that "language offers the surest means of permanent domination;" if we look at Russia forcibly suppressing the old idiom of Poland, at Prussia already hunting French out of Alsace and Lorraine; if we own that "great writers are true conquerors,"—we shall end by recognising that the fate of nations may be influenced by the language which they speak; and having reached that conviction, we shall find it somewhat easier to detect the less visible and often purely individual effect which the custom of our daily talk may work out in each of us. When Jean Jacques Rousseau said, "The tongues of the south are the daughters of joy, but necessity begot the tongues of the north," he

established a distinction which we are half inclined to admit by sympathy, fantastic and exaggerated though it be, and which may provoke in some of us the instinctive sentiment that such wide difference of origin must have ended by producing forms of speech of so differing a character that they can scarcely fail to work different effects on those who habitually employ them. Their influence, thus far at all events, is vague: but as we have what seem to be examples of it before our eyes, we may perhaps confess that the power of expressing courtesy in graceful words disposes men to courtesy; that the habit of abstract expressions inclines their owners to employ them in dreamy speculations; that strange neologisms may give birth to a special literature. The French, the Germans, and the Americans appear to illustrate these three suggestions, and to indicate that they may not be altogether false.

The admission of such a principle, in however restricted a degree, gives new value to language in its application to home life. If talking really be a cause, and not simply an effect, it is indoors that it must necessarily do most work, for there it is in constant use, particularly amongst a nation of chatterers like the French. It is there that intimate locutions assume their fullest force and enter deepest into the composition of daily exist-

ence; it is there that the familiarity of household words constitutes for each family customs and traditions of its own; it is there, if anywhere, that the habitual employment of an adopted phraseology, passed onwards from the mother to the child, insensibly predisposes towards the ways of thinking which that phraseology best expresses. The man who told the same lie so often that he finally believed it to be truth, was but an example of this sort of action — frequent repetition of the same words ended by convincing him. And so it doubtless is in other shapes with the whole mass of our daily talk; we do not see its influence, but that influence is incessant, and in the long-run must tell upon us all. Specific proofs cannot be yet adduced in support of this probability, but the arguments in its favour are not altogether illusory, and it may some day grow into a certainty. Meanwhile it adds fresh interest to the study of modern languages, and renders it more than ever useful to examine their points of difference. French offers a particularly easy field of inquiry for English people, partly because most of us know something about it, and still more because its character is sufficiently distinct from that of our own tongue to render its peculiarities more striking to us from contrast.

The real attraction of the subject does not lie,

however, in the divergences of grammatical construction which separate the two languages; that part of the question was exhausted long ago; and, furthermore, it sheds but little light on the condition of the French people, as evidenced by their talk. The signs of national character come out far more clearly in trifling details of conversation with which grammar has nothing to do—in habitual phrases, in proverbs, similes, and exclamations, in local sayings, and in new words which accident may generate at first, but which habit adopts, and which grow into use because they correspond to a necessity. The conjugation of the verbs, for instance, which establishes so vast a demarcation between the Continental languages and English, does not impart to French any peculiarity of its own. It certainly produces a delicacy of shading of which we have no notion here; but that is no monopoly of France—a dozen other countries possess it too. Such of us as know its value may deplore its absence in our own case, like that of declensions in our nouns; but that is no reason for regarding it as one of the special merits which are inherently proper to French. The insufficiency of expression, the want of the finer tones and colours, which result from our shabby system of auxiliary verbs, are evident enough; but that is a shortcoming peculiar to English: while the far

more graceful and perfect modulations which are produced by directly varying every verb in tense and person, according to the service needed from it, belong to every nation except ourselves, and consequently confer no isolated privilege on France. But French, in common, however, to a great degree, with the other Latin tongues, possesses an immense advantage over the Northern languages in another point of grammar—it puts the substantive before the adjective. To an English ear, thoroughly accustomed to the contrary practice, this does not at first seem to involve any kind of merit; but if the principle be looked at closely, without prejudice, its superiority comes clearly into light. The subject, designated by the substantive, is the essential basis of all descriptive sentences; the qualification of the subject—expressed by the adjective employed—is but subsidiary; it indicates the aspect, the character, the nature, but not the thing itself. Surely, then, it is a wiser, truer, more effective form of phrase to state what the subject is before we assign to it its peculiarities. The French do this; we do not. The French say *un cheval noir;* we say a black horse. The French at once fix our attention on the fact that it is a horse, and nothing but a horse, that they are talking of; while we begin by mentioning a colour, which may belong to anything

whatever, and is in no degree a necessary attribute of a horse. If the Frenchman stops after having said "*cheval,*" his phrase is absolutely complete so far as its object is concerned; his audience can make no mistake as to what he means: but if we suspend our voice after saying "black," our listeners are left to guess what black thing we have in view; for aught they know, it may be a hat, or coal, or night, or a negro. It is true that the context of the unfinished speech may roughly or approximately suggest what species of substantive we were going to name; but even then there is room for abundant doubt as to the particular word left unexpressed. It is useless to add examples, for all would be alike—this one suffices; and if it be considered honestly, without preconceived convictions, it ought to show us that amongst the qualities which constitute effective speaking, in strength, precision, and the all-necessary result of impressing the attention of our auditors with the thought in view, the designation of the thing spoken of before its attributes are defined is one of the most important.

And yet those strange, inexplicable caprices, those odd exceptions, which exist in languages as in all else round us, not unfrequently come in to alter the position of the adjective in French. Here, however, there are, with two exceptions, no rules

to guide us, unless it be in a few special cases where the very meaning of the adjective depends on the place it occupies. *Un homme brave* is brave in the English sense of that description; *un brave homme* is simply a good-natured fellow; corresponding differences of signification result from the substitution of *honnête homme* for *homme honnête*, *femme grosse* for *grosse femme*, *pauvre homme* for *homme pauvre*, *sage femme* for *femme sage*. In these cases, and in one or two others like them, dictionaries and grammars may guide the hesitating foreigner; but long habit alone will teach him that, though in speaking of a black horse he must describe it as *un cheval noir*, it is equally obligatory to say *un beau cheval*; that *une belle robe*, and *une robe blanche*, *un gros livre* and *un livre amusant*, *une grande femme* and *une femme aimable*, and a hundred similarly contradictory locutions, are all pure French, and cannot be otherwise conveyed. These cases are, however, limited to adjectives expressive of beauty or dimension, which constitute the two exceptions just alluded to; they are not numerous enough to modify the rule: and though it has become a sort of fashion during the last thirty years to try to increase their number, though affected women in particular have a tendency to pile up adjectives before they pronounce the substantive, the instinct of the nation

has rejected the attempted innovation—the people feel that what they have is good, and will not change it; and though pretty lips may set them the example of exclaiming, "quelle charmante, adorable, séduisante créature!" they refuse to follow in the new track, and stubbornly persist in saying creature first, and giving its merits afterwards. Conceits of language do not take root in France; indeed, since the Directory and its "incroyables," scarcely an attempt has been made to change either phraseology or pronunciation. Spelling has undergone trifling modifications, new words have been introduced, but form and sound have remained virtually unaltered, notwithstanding the attacks of time and fancy. The objection to placing the adjective in front is necessarily an unconscious one, just as the opposite disposition exists unremarked amongst ourselves. No one thinks about such points at all until attention is directed to them; but if an inquisitive traveller asks a Norman or a Gascon peasant why he puts the substantive first, he will be told, three times out of four, with a copious laugh, as if the fun of such a notion were enormous, "How can you know what I am talking about if I don't tell you?" An English labourer would probably be rather bothered if the inverse question were submitted to him. Even those smart school children who have a pat reply

in readiness on three hundred subjects, would doubtless humiliate their teacher by their ignorance if a curious visitor had the indiscretion to examine them upon it. If, then, the Frenchman can give a reason for the form of phrase which he employs, while the Englishman cannot, is there not in this simple fact an argument in favour of the French system? Putting theory aside, and measuring the matter solely by the instinct of the two populations, as evidenced by their capacity or incapacity to explain the problem, does it not look as if nature and common-sense were both against us here? Regarded as a rule of art, no discussion of the French system seems possible; but as the mass of a nation knows nothing whatever about art, and is guided by habit alone, it is a good mark in its favour to discover that habit can be supported by argument.

It would not, however, be quite fair to assign this faculty of explanation solely to the superior merit of the French form of construction in the particular case before us. Our neighbours enjoy another superiority, and a vastly greater one. They possess and use their language, as a nation, with a perfectness, a completeness, and a dexterity which but few of us attain with English. It is no exaggeration to assert that, taking us as a whole, we do not know how to speak. We are a silent

race; conversation, even in the educated classes, is not regarded, as it is in France, as a necessary element of life; our children are not brought up to talk; they are not guided by their mothers to choose their words and turn their phrases; facility of expression is not considered by us to be indispensable; many of us are content to hold our tongues; we are uncommunicative by nature, and we make no attempt to modify that disposition. The French, on the contrary, wield words with never-failing ease. Their language is a tool to which they are so accustomed, that they can turn it to any use; their fluency is inexhaustible, and generally they speak with grace and with grammatical exactness. Special cases are excluded on both sides in this comparison; it applies solely to the ordinary talk of ordinary people. We are not thinking of the nature of the thoughts expressed, and still less of oratory in any of its varied forms. Parliament, the pulpit, and the bar, involve unusual study and careful preparation, and therefore lie beyond the subject; outdoor gossip and fireside chatter are the true tests of the talking powers of a people; it is to them alone that we can look for evidence. And, furthermore, we must take the lower strata into our account, for it is especially amongst the most untaught that the national tendency will come out with the greatest distinctness.

Viewing the subject in this broad light, it seems difficult that there can be two opinions on it. France is palpably brimful of people who scarcely ever leave off talking, and who, by mere force of exercise, if not by innate skill, acquire a dexterity and a facility of wording which no other land can match. They may talk nonsense all day long, there may not be one idea worth remembering in all they say; but they pour out sentences with an unceasing flow, and in a form which proves that at all events they know their language thoroughly.

This capacity is certainly one of the most striking features of French life; we find it, in varying degrees and stages of development, wherever we turn our ears. From childhood to old age everybody talks, and, so far as regards the mere roll of words, talks well. Whether the higher classes, as a whole, speak better than they do in other countries, is a question difficult to decide, for the answer to it depends almost entirely on the accidents of experience, and on personal sympathies and likings. One witness may be all for France and another all against her, each following the bent of his own prejudices, each guided by his own means of observation and by his power of forming an opinion on such a subject. But, without going into this thorny point, it may be advanced as a generally-admitted truth, that the better sort of French-

women speak with a gaiety, a dash, a facility of simile and contrast, and a readiness of *à propos*, which carry their talking very near to what we understand by brilliancy, and that some of them reach absolute perfection. It is natural that it should be so; for where the constant object is to amuse and brighten, the means must gradually adapt themselves to the end; cause and result become somewhat identical; the speaker talks to laugh, and laughs because she talks.

Is not this a cheery and an enviable attribute? Is it likely that the character of a people can remain permanently unaffected by such influences, or that the brightness, the *insouciance*, and perhaps even the frivolity of French nature, are not strengthened and augmented by this charming chattering of the women?

Unfortunately they are not all alike; though they all talk volubly, they are not all amusing. If they were, France would be all over what it is only here and there,—the home of the pleasantest society in Europe. But when one has the luck to stumble on a type of the higher sort, it is indeed a privilege to look and listen, and to feel the spell which women of such a kind cast around them. The exceptional cases in which Frenchwomen attain to the utmost height of indoor eloquence dwell in the memory of those who have met with

them: it would be difficult to forget the deep indent which they produce. Their mastery of words is wonderful, and it is accompanied by such a wholesale scattering of odd comparisons, unexpected images, strange illustrations, wild paradoxes, and tempestuous fancies, that the assemblage of all these elements seems momentarily to add fresh brightness to the air, and most certainly gives the novice listener a new idea of what words can do. Time does not weaken this impression; habit does not wear it out: as it is produced but rarely, its very scarceness makes it live. But even if it were universal its reality would not be much diminished, for its cause is so intensely pleasant that no custom could lead us to insensibility of its charms.

The men have less of this peculiar power; most of them know their language well, and, as far as mere machinery goes, are as productive as the women; but, with rare exceptions, they do not handle forms so capriciously or so luxuriantly; their imagery is less fantastic, their contrasts are less vivid, their outpouring is less torrential. It is the women who best represent the talking qualities of the nation; it is they who show us practically what the absorption, assimilation, and reproduction of other people's ideas can do to produce the appearance of widespread knowledge and of well-digested thought. Frenchwomen do not

read, at least not as we understand reading here; and yet many of them appear to know something about everything. No subject comes amiss to the practised Parisienne. If the conversation turns suddenly towards some fact or argument of which she never heard before, she listens for three minutes, and then dashes into the midst, plunging right and left, making at first impossible mistakes, which she covers up by dexterous pleading, but ending, nine times out of ten, by an appreciation so singularly correct that when you go away you can't help thinking, "That woman is positively amazing; there is no beating her." The book-learning of Frenchwomen stops, pretty generally, with their school days; but that famous theory of "education by contact," which they practise with such consummate skill, goes on through their entire lifetime, and is the real source of the elastic knowledge which such numbers of them make us believe that they possess. This, however, would not be possible if, in such special cases, they were not good absorbers as well as good discoursers. They take in new notions from the mouths of others, dress them up in a disguise which few can penetrate, and then parade them as their individual property. Of the many brilliant qualities of the race, there are few which have the worth of this one. It sets to work the moment two people

are together; for two implies talking, and talking and picking up new ideas are synonymous processes with women such as these.

In varying degrees this disposition is general throughout the land — the whole nation imitates; but the result depends on the actor's position and skill. The lower classes have no time to give to the sharpening of their wit and tongue. The process is, after all, a luxury; for it is scarcely realisable without the aid of sufficient education, opportunity, and close attention. Like many other developments of human nature, it needs the ease and the facilities which money alone creates. A farmer's poultry girl may have within her a sacred fire which a faint breeze of occasion and example would fan into the first flicker which precedes bright flame; but where is the breeze to come from? The faculty of imitation grows with use; without practice it remains dormant, or even dies away. Even supposing, which is absurd, that the disposition to talk cleverly is born in every Frenchman, it will be choked, in all but the richer homes, by sheer want of the means of action. But volubility and glibness do not depend on the accident of birth. It is true that they too gain by following a pattern; but as that pattern can be found all over France, in the cottages and the wine-shops as much as in chateaux and in Paris

drawing-rooms, they do not suffer, as really good talking does, from the want of models. So we find them everywhere, pouring out of nearly every mouth, men and women aiding each other to keep up the prattle.

But they do not know it. They have no idea that they are always at it. If by chance some one informs them of the fact, they reply that they think loquacity particularly natural—indeed it looks to them like a duty. To a Frenchman it is an article of faith that his voice was given to him to be used: he never can be got to understand that it may possibly be a virtue to hold his tongue. He quotes with a smile of contemptuous pity the proverb of the conquered Arab, "Talking is silver, but silence is gold." To him talking represents all the precious metals, and diamonds into the bargain. He can imagine nothing of higher value, or which constitutes a more irresistible necessity. And from a certain point of view he may not be so far wrong as he appears to be at first to us dumb people. His notion of life is different from ours—he hates to be alone: communion with his fellows is the main object of his existence; he always has a theory to expound or a curiosity to satisfy. Take him where you please, all through the social scale, the same implacable need comes out. On the Paris Boulevards or over the dusty roads of

Provence, on the wet coast of Brittany or in the factories at Lille, he is, with rare exceptions, everywhere alike. Climate or occupation make but little difference to him. Both sexes and all ages substantially agree that men and women were born to talk.

Let us not judge him by ourselves. It is neither wise nor practical to apply the habits and regulations of the United Kingdom to all the rest of the globe. They do marvellously well for us—they have helped us to become very prosperous and very powerful; but maybe they would not produce the same results elsewhere. After all, our islands (including Man, the Orkneys, and the other rocks) only represent about a sixteen-hundredth part of the surface of the earth; and that fact ought to counsel us to be modest. If we say that the Frenchman is wrong to chatter all day long, on the simple ground that we get on better by the use of silence, we ought, logically, to apply the same argument to everything else that we don't do, and to object to the habits of every nation which does not employ Kidderminster carpets, boiled mutton, and umbrellas. It is true that such a view of international obligations would oblige the Hindoos to eat cold beef and mashed potatoes, the Hottentots to wear braces, and the Japanese to adopt hanging,—unless, by the way,

as they are the more numerous, they were to turn round upon us with an imperious order to give up our own habits and adopt theirs—to feed ourselves with rice, to go approximately naked, and to introduce bowel-opening at the Old Bailey—all which would be disagreeable to us. This argument, which, possibly, is not altogether absurd, should incline us to indulgence toward the benighted nations who have not the privilege of living precisely according to our prejudices. It should dispose us mercifully to permit the Amazon Indians to bore holes through their noses, and even, though that is far more difficult, to allow the French to talk for eighteen hours a-day. We do not recognise that chattering is a vast enjoyment to them, that it is one of the main causes of their gaiety, that it lights up their indoor life in a way of which we have no idea, that it cements home ties by creating a constant necessity for mutual presence, and that, in many cases, it develops intelligence, and induces correctness, ability, and brilliancy in conversation. Practice alone gives skill; and for that reason, if for no other, the habit of frequent speaking deserves encouragement.

And yet, with the decadence of France before our eyes, it is impossible to avoid asking whether all this talk may not have aided the breakdown;

whether it has not contributed to bring about the crash. Whatever be its merits, whatever be the considerations which can be invoked in favour of it, has it done no harm? When history begins to dissect this modern decline and fall, will it take no note of the salient feature of French habits? will it acquit the people's ready tongues of all share of responsibility? That the incessant spilling of empty words must necessarily stimulate frivolity of thought, seems to be a probable if not a certain proposition. That the cherished music of one's own voice ends by becoming particularly agreeable, is a fact of which we see examples even outside France. That the soothing vanity which springs from it should incline the self-approving speaker to believe in what he supposes to be the opinions he expresses, is a simple and natural transition. That these mental processes should result in a peculiar disposition to consider one's self very wise and decidedly worth listening to, appears to be mathematically demonstrable. It looks, then, as if the self-conceit, the impatience of observation and advice, the rejection of all unpleasant truths, the resolute credulity of their own fancies which the war brought so glaringly into light amongst the mass of Frenchmen, may, not unreasonably, be partially explained by the accumulated effects of years of idle talking. It would

be exaggeration to assign too much importance to such a cause; but that it has had some hand in the demoralisation of the nation does appear to be very likely. For social purposes, as a provocative of friendly association, as a gilder of home life, and even, in certain cases, as a stimulant of talent and of natural eloquence, perpetual talking is defensible; but judged by the other effects which it may be presumed to have produced in France, it does harm both morally and politically, and it is more than doubtful whether that harm is compensated by the advantages gained in other directions.

A reservation must, however, be expressed before we leave this part of the question. There are some Frenchmen who do not talk, and some Frenchwomen too. Not that they are exactly silent—that adjective never can apply to them; but relatively, they hold their tongues. They speak when they have something to say, but they are not always speaking; their mouth is not, like most of the mouths around them, a *moulin à paroles*. Such accidental cases can, however, scarcely be attributed to the interference of reason; they are brought about by personal causes rather than by reflection. They may be attributable to indolence, or ill-health, or stupidity, or bashfulness (the latter explanation would,

however, be rare); but it would not be easy to find many examples in which moderate talking is an evident consequence of the employment of intelligence and free election. Still, whatever be their origin, these exceptions do exist; and, strange as it may appear, there positively are French people who are capable of sitting for a whole evening without opening their lips, unless it be to yawn or drink *tilleul*.

If we turn from the aspects of the subject as a whole to the details of wording and of phrasing which make up familiar talk, we find in them differences from our own expressions which, though relatively few in number, suffice to indicate marked contrasts of form and thought, and even of national habits. These differences merit examination, not only for the sake of satisfying curiosity, but because, when they are real, and not merely external, they lead us to inquire why idioms differ between close neighbours, what is likely to be the influence on French minds of certain particular locutions which the French employ, and what is the evidence of their condition which results therefrom. The needs of modern nations are growing so much alike, there is everywhere such a disposition to import each other's technicalities when they supply a new necessity, that radical peculiarities in single words are becoming somewhat rare. "Pudding," "com-

fort," "cold cream," and "rail," have become French within our generation, while we have borrowed back *vis-à-vis, ennui, protégé, chignon,* and *chaperon.* Yet there are still gaps on both sides, and some of them are of a nature to make both sides stop to think a little. For instance, the French language contains no such word as "sober." It possesses the positive expressions "drunk" and "tipsy," which are literally conveyed by *ivre* and *gris;* but our negative denomination "sober" has no existence across the Channel. *Sobre* is in no degree its counterpart; the meanings of the two words are absolutely different. The French one is translatable solely by "temperate" or "abstemious;" never can it or any other Gallic syllables be made to signify the opposite condition to intoxication. The entire absence of any word descriptive of that state, is in itself an argument and a declaration. The English drink enough to need a special illustrative title for a man who has not drunk; the French, though the Parisians did begin to rather copiously swallow alcohol during the two sieges, have never yet felt the necessity of forming any such curious subjective appellation, consequently they have not got it. Here is, surely, an evidence of character betrayed by language. A second odd example is the total absence, in French, of any word equivalent to "listener."

It seems hardly credible that, with thirty-seven million of talkers, no provision, other than the cumbrous paraphrase, *celui qui écoute*, should have been made for auditors. The only interpretation of so odd a blank lies in the supposition that each Frenchman chatters for himself, not for others; and that, not caring whether he is listened to or not, he has never recognised that he has no denomination for the person to whom he speaks, He has the verb *écouter*, but no corresponding substantive. In the same way he can say "to teach," but he cannot express "teacher." Another singularly suggestive vacancy exists in all the dictionaries opposite the eminently British adjective "dowdy." No Frenchwoman ever merited that epithet. Call her all the hard names you like, "dowdy," at all events, will never come into your head or hers. The notion it conveys is so foreign to her comprehension, that there is no practicable channel for communicating our interpretation of it to her. And who ever saw a "genteel" Frenchwoman? And who ever saw one "giggle?" Neither those odious words, nor the still more odious ideas which they convey, exist beyond Dover Straits. But if France owns these enviable privileges, she pays for them in the utter want of "gentleman." She has, however, the goodness to recognise her insufficiency, and to absorb the word

from us, telling us, possibly with some truth, that she does so because a gentleman is so essentially modern an invention that she has had no time, in the middle of her revolutions, to compose her own word for it. And again, though the change of subject is rather wide, no Frenchman can understand what on earth we mean by that omnipresent, universal, elastic "stuff," which, with us, indicates nearly everything which language can convey, materially, morally, and intellectually. We never stop to think about it; but if we did, surely we should be humiliated at the poverty of invention which has led us to assign such an infinite variety of significations to that one wretched monosyllable.

There are not very many more words than these which cannot somehow be rendered out of English; but there is a second category of expressions where all the advantage lies on our side, because, though they can be translated with more or less exactness, they have a merit and precision in Anglo-Saxon which their representatives in French in no degree possess. Such are, in verbs,—shrivel, dabble, baffle, jerk, coax, ride, trample, smoulder, trickle, scowl, stare, stand, and huddle; in adjectives,—bleak, dreary, grim, forlorn, neat, dutiful, eager, earnest, few, snug, and flimsy; in substantives,—rustle, ripple, bloom, gloom, sneak, sheen, and quibble. These examples, which are put down at hazard, will serve

to show what is the class of words in which we excel; and the evidence will become clearer still if we compare some of them with their French equivalents. *Frou-frou* is a pretty sound, but never did it suggest the crisp echoes of moving silk as "rustle" does; "mounting on a horse" may be a grammatical definition, but "riding" says the same thing with very different vigour; "trickle" talks to us so cunningly of slow-falling drops that we can almost see and hear them, but *couler* or *dégoutter* rouse no such imagination in us; *morne* perhaps does come nearly up to "dreary," and that is a vast deal to say, for the latter is a word of prodigious significance, but it is the only exception worth mentioning in the list; *regarder* or *dévisager* will not do for "stare;" *fleur* is indeed a poor substitute for "bloom;" *faire une mine rechignée* can scarcely be said to come up to "scowl;" *délaissé* does not translate "forlorn;" *obéissant et respectueux* do not express our idea of "dutiful." In all these cases, and in many others like them, the advantage is on our side. It continues with us in such phrases as "raw weather," "sandy hair," in which the adjectives are used with the happiest audacity; and in such words as stately, listless, lonely, somehow, scramble, twang, and scribble, which are all full of merit. If we want to say "kick" in French, we must resort to the eminently oblique expression,

"give a blow of the foot;" but if we have to indicate narrowness, shortness, flatness, or tightness, we find, to our consternation, that we cannot say them at all; they are absolutely inexpressible in any form whatever. In moments of such distress as this one is tempted to regret that the French have not adopted the German system of converting verbs and adjectives into substantives when wanted, so that we might help ourselves to a new word to fill the vacant place.

In quoting these examples, the object is not to show what a great language English is—we are all of us sufficiently convinced of that already—but to indicate the exact nature of the gaps in French. The catalogue might be extended: with time, and patience, and much comparison, it might possibly be carried up to a hundred words; but that is certainly a maximum—it is the utmost limit of our advantage. Our strength lies in such of our words as are purely Anglo-Saxon (it will be noticed that Latin origins contribute nothing to the list), and it takes the form of fine shades of meaning rather than of monopoly of idea. With the exception of a few words—a dozen, perhaps, in all—the French can say all that we can, only we can say it better in the particular cases which have been enumerated here. We have not much reason to be proud of that, for our language has been made up by public subscrip-

tion: several sources have contributed to it; we have received donations in abundance; we have pillaged where foreign charity has ceased to supply us. And we have done very right. The object of all language is to become copious and expressive. We have pursued that object; and though our descendants in the New World show us every day that additions to our common stock can still be made, we have attained a remarkable sufficiency by the employment of mixtures, absorptions, loans, and robbery.

French is, on the contrary, a relatively pure language. There has been but one great graft on the original tree. The French have not gone about the world as we have done—they have stopped at home; and the perfecting of their language has been wrought out almost entirely by internal development alone since the Romans introduced Latin into Gaul. This is another reason why their talking, as it now stands, should be indicative of their character. It *is their own work*; it has been virtually free from extraneous action. Until the last few years, and then only within the limits of special technicalities, its neologisms have not been borrowed—they have been invented out of the home stock. French consequently represents the French far more exactly than English represents the English. Its merits and defects are properly its own, for some sixteen centuries have passed

since a new element has been infused into it. During that long period it has slowly grown to what it is, unaided from abroad, excepting in the narrow frontier districts, where neighbouring tongues have influenced local forms. If then we find, as certainly we do, that, on the whole, it is a somewhat richer language than our own, we ought to be thereby disposed to recognise that the French, though unassisted from the outside (and perhaps for that very reason), have developed their language more than we have done. Their constant need and constant use of it have, however, naturally contributed to this result. But we do not observe in French in greater abundance than in English, words of which it has an absolute monopoly. As examples of such words we may mention *chef-d'œuvre, à propos, maniéré, panaché, vogue, endimanché, chaussure,* all which are untranslatable. But where the wealth really lies is in the large number of finely-shaded significations, whose precision and delicacy are unapproachable by the corresponding terms which exist in English. Of this class there are hundreds of examples, but they must be felt,—they cannot be described. To give a catalogue of them would be both wearisome and useless; a few illustrations may, however, be found in such verbs as *accaparer, talonner, effleurer, s'acharner, tisonner, abîmer;* such adjectives as

flou, flasque, hérissé, blasé, guindé, dépareillé, maussade; such substantives as *convenance, tripotage, débacle, badaud, bêtise, débris, malaise,*— all of which, and crowds of others like them, are vastly fuller of suggestive meaning, as well as of scrupulous exactness, than anything we can pair with them. Indeed it is one of the marked characters of French, that its words, especially its verbs, are not only numerous, but singularly happy in the precision of their sense; and as the language is furthermore most copiously supplied with approximate synonyms, the result is, that well-spoken French attains a descriptive force of which our phrase "word-painting" supplies few examples in our own tongue. This doctrine will naturally be disputed; but it should be remembered that it can only be fairly judged by such of us as possess an equal habit of both languages, and can consequently accurately weigh their comparative value. There is no doubt that each possesses certain superiorities. It seems, for instance, to be very likely that even those who would give the preference to French for speaking, might incline to think that English is a better vehicle for writing; but it is probable that if an unprejudiced jury could be constituted, composed of persons really capable to decide, its verdict would be in favour of French as a medium of perfect conversation.

In addition to the examples which have just been given, there are certain other richnesses of French which cannot be passed over without observation, for their employment is so continuous that they are heard all day and everywhere, and form almost an element of life. The sweet little exclamation *dame* is never out of the women's mouths; and though men use it too, it has so feminine a character that they ought to be forbidden to employ it. It expresses such a quantity of hesitations, such a mist of elastic doubt, such a haze of incredulous uncertainty, that it is scarcely possible to convey its meaning. "Really I have no idea," "it is though," "let me think about it," "I'll tell you presently," and "what do you think yourself?" all rolled together, would supply no adequate equivalent for this prodigious syllable. It is a language in itself, and its universality is not open to the accusation which was just now brought against the omnipresent English "stuff," because that much-misapplied noun is supposed to be descriptive in every sense which is assigned to it, while *dame* is purely ejaculatory, and may therefore, without inconsistency, signify whatever you like. The duplication of certain words is another peculiarity which should be noticed. *Jour* becomes *journée* when the duration of the daytime and not the day itself is to be conveyed. So is it again with *an* and

année, matin and *matinée, soir* and *soirée. Si* is substituted for *oui,* if an affirmative reply is to be given to a question suggesting doubt, or if a previous *oui* has not carried conviction with it: to "Is it raining?" the answer would be *oui;* to "It is not raining, is it?" it would be *si.* New is expressed by *nouveau* if it refers to something which is commencing, by *neuf* if the something has not been used before. Number is called *numero* to express a figure, *nombre* to express a quantity. Before is conveyed by *devant* if it be a question of position, by *avant* if it be a question of time. Stalk becomes *queue* if it be a single stem, *rafle* if it be a bunch, like grapes or currants. We have but the one phrase "dozen;" the French have, *dizaine, douzaine, quinzaine, vingtaine,* and so on up to *centaine. En amont* means up the current of a stream; *en aval* is down the river. "More" is expressed by *plus* or *davantage,* according to variations of signification which it would be a waste of space to go into here. The French say *se moucher, se ganter, se chausser,* all which ideas are expressed by us in the most lumbering forms of speech. Again, what words have we for *verglas,*—that peculiar state in which roads become like glass from frost; for *contre-coup,* for *séduisant,* for *famélique,* for *recherché?* So we might go on for half an hour.

In terms of tenderness and affection French is, however, singularly poor. It contains absolutely nothing which is susceptible of being compared to our most admirable "darling." It has absurd denominations supposed to be suggestive of much love—but so have we; and there is not much to choose between the ridiculous inexpressiveness of duck and pet on our side, or of "little cabbage" and "little rabbit" on the other. Where France, and indeed all Europe, beats us, is in that adorable *tutoiement*, that sweet use of "thou," which marks out so sharp a line between those we really love and the chilly world outside. There is no explaining to an Englishman what *tutoiement* means; there is no suggesting to him what a depth of fondness is contained in *tu*. When the subtle intensity of its sweetness has penetrated to our heart, we stare with wonder at the unhappy people who say *you* to wife and child; from our soul we pity them, and wonder whether they really think that "you" means love. To the real Englishman, to the insular thorough Britisher, this will look like folly; but let him ask Europe what *tutoiement* means, what is the inland sea of tenderness which it encloses; let him consult such advisers as have lived in sufficient contact with foreign friendships to be able to measure "you" and "thou" (the language hardly matters, for *tu* is everywhere outside our chalk

cliffs); let him try to realise the profound, the limitless distinction which the exclusive use towards those we cherish of so marked a form of speech must necessarily establish,—and then, perchance, he may admit that "there is something in it." Indeed there is. To gain the consciousness of what *tutoiement* means it is worth while to live for years abroad—just as a voyage across the Atlantic is well paid for by the sight of Niagara Falls; it is a new sense which we acquire. It compensates for that incredible deficiency of French, the absence of distinct words for love and like, and for wife and woman; but the deficiency is evident to all England, while the compensation is appreciable only by a small minority amongst us.

In consequence of the general precision of its terms, French is a good language for the expression of distinct definitions; but, at the same time, the genius of the race inclines it to the employment of insinuations. No people are so able as the French to imply indirectly what they do not choose to say point-blank. But that is a peculiarity of their nature rather than of their language. Their words are for the most part absolute; but notwithstanding that, their talk is suggestive rather than declarative. The idioms which are at their disposal enable them to define with singular exactness, but the tendency of their character leads certainly the

other way, and their ordinary disposition in conversation is to convey their meaning by implication and not to give it outright. Of course this sort of phrasing is limited to cases where it does not weaken the effect which the speaker wishes to produce; but as those cases are very frequent, it is heard continually. And yet it seems at first to be out of place; for it is not easy to comprehend why distinctness should so often be avoided, and why suggestion should be put forward in its stead. The explanation evidently lies in the love of talk, in the disposition to make talking last, and in the consequent disinclination to employ short definitions. It needs some skill to avoid using terms which would use up our ideas too rapidly; but the result is reached throughout the eighty-six departments (the loss of Alsace-Lorraine has brought back the number to what it was before the annexation of Nice and Savoy). Plenty of examples might be given of the difficulty which is here overcome, but one will suffice to show its nature. There are eight main words in French which express the various forms of fear; each has its own peculiar sense: *alarme* springs from what we learn, *effroi* from what we see, *terreur* from what we imagine, *frayeur* from what surprises us, *épouvante* from what we take for granted, *crainte* from what we know, *peur* from the opinions which we entertain, *appré-*

hension from what we anticipate. Well, despite the critical precision of these varied meanings, the French, especially the women, have a habit of dancing round them all, and of using subterfuges, shades, and parables, which illustrate the sentiment of fear in all sorts of other ways. This is incontestably a talent, but it may be doubted whether it constitutes an advantage. It implies ability, or rather cleverness in the speaker, but it does not show the merit of the language. It necessarily stimulates the manufacture of neologisms, and it may be that the numerical abundance of French words is due, in some degree, to this unceasing cause. It cannot, however, be denied, that such a disposition improves the talking power of all those who act upon it; for its first effect is to oblige them to seek new clothes for old ideas, new frames for well-known pictures. A people which is always talking, and which is perpetually inventing fresh expressions, because its character tempts it away from those which exist already, must inevitably attain two principal results: it must learn to talk, and it must extend its dictionary. In Paris there is a never-ending fabrication of new words—each year brings out a dozen of them; some die away immediately, others live and become definitely adopted. Most of them, however, are in their origin slang expressions, which only acquire their

naturalisation in daily talk after time and habit have slowly purged them of their first meaning, and have rendered them acceptable to public usage in a modified form.

One enormous difference between French and English lies in the odd fact, that whereas we absorb with unhesitating readiness all the expressive phrases we can get hold of (we have gone on doing so for a thousand years), the French do not bring into general circulation any of the local sayings which have existed in their provinces for centuries, indisputably good as many of them are. The Normandy cidermakers, who, of course, are never satisfied with their crop of apples, say, when they are asked what sort of a year it is for them, "*Pour une année où il n'y a pas de pommes il y a des pommes; mais pour une année où il y a des pommes, il n'y a pas de pommes.*" The Provence olive-growers use the same comparison in a still more striking form: their words are, "*Dire qu'il n'y en a pas, il y en a; mais dire qu'il y en a, il n'y en a pas.*" Well, these wonderful expressions, full as they are of force and vigour and fantastic truth—and there are many others like them—are scarcely known outside the frontiers of the districts where they were invented. They languish in country villages, unknown to the sharp people who set new inventions going on the asphalt outside Tortoni's

door. Yet they have more figurative value than nine-tenths of the absurd novelties which crawl into circulation because they have been edited at the Vaudeville or the Palais Royal, and they are worth quite as much as the average of the Yankeeisms which we lay hands on here the moment they are imported. The reason of their exclusion is, that Paris holds so inveterately to its supposed rights as a capital, that it refuses to endorse what it has not invented; and as nothing goes down in France without its stamp, the whole mass of outside cleverness is thereby shut out from any participation in the development of French, excepting in so far as purely local usages are concerned. But if any discontented mind, domiciled between the Rue de Richelieu and the Madeleine, objects to the old phrase *très cherché* as being incomplete, and suggests that *très trouvé* should be adopted in its place, he will find a crowd of approving listeners, who will exclaim, "How well imagined that is! *Très cherché* implied only that the result was looked for, and in no way indicated that it was attained; *très trouvé*, on the contrary, contains internal evidence that the end is reached: *vive très trouvé!*" So *très trouvé* immediately becomes French, and travels by the first train into the expectant and obedient country districts, where it is at once employed because it comes from Paris. This may be a small

sign, but it helps to show that though the National Assembly may linger at Versailles it will not manage to decapitalise Paris, in our time at all events. Lyons is a big place, and so is Bordeaux, but what influence have they on French? Even Marseille, with its droll exaggerations and its southern fancies, does no more than furnish stories at which Paris sometimes condescends to smile, but to which it does not grant the privilege of incorporation into its own special circulation.

As regards pronunciation, the ancient privilege of Touraine still exists in undiminished force. The peasants and their children talk French there as it is heard in no other part of France; their enunciation and their intonation are so pure, that one listens to them for the first time with a feeling of half-incredulous bewilderment. No Parisienne speaks with such delicacy of articulation, or such critical truth of accent. The district in which this rare excellence is attained begins at Orleans and ends at Tours. Blois occupies its centre; and it is in and around that dull old town that the most absolute perfection is attained. The children who make dirt-pies on the borders of the Loire, pronounce far better than the actors at the Théâtre Français. There has never been an orator in the Chamber, or in the pulpit of Nôtre Dame, who has spoken French as they do; and yet the little rascals

have no idea of it. It is positively humiliating to chat with them, for you cannot get rid of the unpleasant feeling that a baby of five years old is giving you a lesson. Elsewhere it is all *patois*. Railways may end by levelling out the differences of speech in France, as they have already levelled dress and prices; but, thus far, the *patois* of each district remains intact, with all its essences and colours. In the country of the old *langue d'oil* there are still twelve *patois*, of which the Breton, the Normand, the Poitevin, and the Champenois are the chief; in the provinces where once the *langue d'oc* was spoken, we have the Provençal, the Auvergnat, the Limousin, and others. Altogether there are more than twenty of them, without counting the local subdivisions, which are as numerous as the varied shapes of the caps which the village women wear. Some of them are languages in themselves. No Frenchman, properly so called, can understand the private talk of the Breton peasants when they come in pilgrimage to St Anne d'Auray; or of the dock labourers at Marseille; or of the goat-herds of the Valley d'Ossau, when they meet, beneath the shade of the Pic du Midi, at their annual festival at Laruns. And yet these dialects are all so local, they are so pitilessly shut inside a circle, that they exercise no kind of influence, however slight, on the French around them. Even the

Spanish tendencies which leak across the Basque frontier, and the vile Italian which struggles along the borders of the Var, do not penetrate ten miles —French battles with them, and drives them back discomfited. The fact is that France is a country of strong unity, utterly unlike its neighbours, and having no small contempt for them; so, when they try to push in the wedge of their insinuating tongue, France rejects them resolutely. Even on those now conquered hillsides which slope downwards to the Rhine, German had been replaced by what was called Alsatian—an odious form of speech it was, but its speakers loved France enough to fancy that they were talking French. To-day they have to relapse to German, and they do not like it.

For foreigners French is not a hard language to pronounce, approximately at least. But each nationality brings its own accent into it, the English being perhaps the most copiously supplied therewith. The *oi oi* of the Britisher is a distinctive mark, which he finds it difficult to efface. He has no suspicion that it exists; but "*l'accent Anglais*" is so largely practised about France, that the French, at all events, well know its peculiar sound, and have some trouble in comprehending that the English do not hear it themselves with the same distinctness. But they do not; they go on talking, "not French of Paris, but French of Stratford-on-

Bow-Town," as Chaucer put it some time ago, with a placidity and a confidence worthy of a better end. There must be, in a good many of us, something which altogether rebels against other tongues, for it is only amongst ourselves that cases can be found of persons who have lived regularly for thirty years in France, and who, at the end of that long period, say "*le people Français;*" and are so incapable of distinguishing between the sound of *voleur* and *velours*, that they pronounce both alike as "*vollioure.*" These examples are rigorously true, and many more like them might be cited. Our great difficulty is, that we talk mainly from the middle of the mouth, while the French form their sounds in front, close against the teeth. When we have acquired the same habit, we have got half-way towards speaking French; until we have acquired it our chance is hopeless. As, however, most of us do not particularly care whether we speak well or badly, it is scarcely to be expected that we shall take the trouble which this implies. We argue that, after all, French is only one of the two thousand languages which have grown up since Babel separated us into nations, and that it is only under special circumstances that it becomes essential to know it really well. This consideration appears to us to be an excuse for our indifference.

To the French themselves the question takes a different form. To them it seems that they possess the great language of humanity, the essential vehicle of thought, the natural expresser of grace and courtesy and wit. They urge that this view has been adopted by other countries; that French has been raised, with the consent of Europe, to a sort of international position, for which it was recognised to be peculiarly fitted in consequence of its own merits, and of the political and literary influence which it represented. History, "the witness of time, the messenger of antiquity," certainly confirms this argument. It shows us that French has gradually reached a place and obtained a power which no other language has acquired since Latin died away. Its universality and its precision have combined to render it the adopted channel of European communication, not only for public purposes, but also to a great extent for social and daily wants. Even the results of the late war, far spreading as they are, seem scarcely likely to affect the empire which the French language has attained during the two last centuries. German has not the qualities to which the Continental world has grown accustomed by its long use of French. No other tongue can pretend to dispute the mastery; we may consequently expect to see French retain its ground, unweakened if not un-

assailed. Prince Bismark's resolution to recognise it no longer as the accepted organ of diplomacy will have but small effect now that the upper classes of all Europe learn it as the first condition of their education. The true interest of its influence lies, however, inside the boundaries of its native land. Its force beyond those limits may constitute a question for the world at large; but its action within the frontiers is all that France itself need care for, and is all that we have to look at. The sketch which has been given here of its uses and peculiarities may perhaps suffice, incomplete and shadowy as it is, to show that it is a language which, by its special nature, and by the unbroken continuity of its employment, can scarcely fail to produce distinct effects on those who speak it. It may be so with all other tongues; but if it be true of them, it must assuredly be still more true of French. Its abundance, its precision, its graceful forms, handled by a whole nation of dexterous, inventive speakers, constitute the best talking instrument we know of; that is tolerably evident. But how does it react on its proprietor? what is its real share in the constitution of national character and of home life in France?

Answers to questions such as these can only be suggested; they cannot be put forward with any certainty, or with any expectation that they

will carry conviction to those who hear them. The very principle of the possible effect of language on those who use it all day long may be rejected by many persons as an exaggeration or even an absurdity. And yet, in the case before us, it is difficult to doubt, after a real examination of French habits, that they are gravely influenced by the need of talk, and by the practices which that need provokes. To what other cause can we logically assign the marked disposition of the French to seek each other in all the varying shapes which society can take? Why do they go to *cafés*, and sit together beneath the trees, and establish public meeting-places, and pay evening visits, and make acquaintance with almost every one they meet? The explanation which most English people will probably incline to give is, that all this happens because they are too frivolous, too incapable of sufficing singly for their needs, to be able to stop alone. That theory is spiteful, but untrue. The French are generally competent to get through their time without side aid; but they are so resolutely convinced that mankind was not made for solitude, that its destiny is to mix and talk and laugh, that they imagine they are discharging one of the duties of humanity in flocking constantly together. But there would be no use in that if they did not talk; they do not meet

to gaze in silence at each other; if such were the object held out to them, they would stay at home, for they are not solely gregarious, but communicative. May it not, then, be urged that it is the thirst for talk which induces all the rest, and that the outdoor habits of the people flow naturally from that main source? If this be granted, at all events as a probability, it becomes somewhat more easy to follow up the developments of the question. If talk be recognised as a general object and a natural occupation, if the longing for it be the true explanation of the marked social tendencies of the French, if their customs are largely guided by the satisfaction of that longing, it would seem to ensue, almost necessarily, that character as well as customs must be operated on by the same wide-spreading cause. But if so, this further influence would be produced rather by the nature and composition of the talk than by the simple fact of its existence; and thus it is that the peculiarities of language would come into play, and would work out their consequence.

That consequence would seem to assume several forms. The first of these is a disposition to be excessive in the expression of most of the ordinary feelings. The French generally speak with vehemence; they use suggestive phrases and copious epithets; they pile up description and imaginative

colouring, and so get often led away beyond the exactness which more moderation would maintain. This, however, would not be possible if the words at their disposal did not lend themselves to such a service. It is not, therefore, a mere product of excitability of nature, it is also, and in a great degree, a fruit of the language used, which leads on by its abundance and stimulates by its powers of strong shading. Another and still more marked effect of French on those who speak it as a native tongue, is to place at their command such innumerable and admirable means of being polite, that it would be strange indeed if they resisted the temptation. That French manners have been in part nursed up to what they are by the direct action of the language in facilitating the extremes of courtesy, is an argument which will generally be admitted, and which would alone suffice, so evident does it seem, to give some reason to the theory which is advocated here, of the influence of talk on character. A third result, though less distinctly traceable, is the fostering of gaiety, by bright sentences and sunny words. French wit is a very different thing from English humour; it is based on insinuation, suggestion, and comparison, and could have no existence, in its special form, if language did not aid it. This is distinctly provable by the difficulty, if not impossibility, of translating French

esprit; it cannot live or be in any other tongue. Whether the faculty of analysis, of separating and grouping ideas, of assigning its exact measure to each element of a subject, is better exercised in French than in other idioms, is one of those wide, open questions which it is scarcely prudent to discuss; they lead too far. But it may be indicated as meriting some consideration; for, to such of us as are disposed to answer it in the affirmative, it would serve as an additional witness in support of the hypothesis which we are suggesting.

And even if this hypothesis be a dream; even if language drips over us without leaving a trace of its constant passage; even if it possesses no kind of action, no sort of influence over nations who could not live without it; even if French qualities and French defects are solely brought about by personal internal movements with which language has no connection,—even then we can scarcely fail to own that, reduced to the *rôle* of a passive instrument of speech, with no power and no authority of its own, French is a singularly winning and attractive tongue, which is marvellously well dealt in by its owners. None of us would consent to exchange English for it; but many of us would say, in imitation of the Frenchman's compliment to England, "If English were not my language, I should wish that French were."

CHAPTER VII.

DRESS.

THERE was a time when men used to dress; when high hats, black coats and trousers, were not invented; when velvet, lace and satin, feathers, curls and ruffles, were masculine adornments; when women had no monopoly of the more delicate materials of costume; when colour, shape, and substance were at the equal disposition of both sexes. The Revolution of 1789, its consequences throughout Europe, the levelling tendencies which resulted from it, brought about equality in men's clothes, and gradually led us to the hideousness of covering which now distinguishes male humanity, and to the apathy which induces us to support it without revolt. The slavery of habit, the tyranny of our neighbours, the terror of opinion, have thus far kept us where we are, and have rendered change impossible; but, for our children's sake, it is indeed to be fondly hoped that a resolute reformer will soon appear, and will deliver us from our bondage. Our

period is great in trade, in newspapers, in preserved meat, in war; but it strangles individuality, it chokes all aspirations which lie outside the adopted groove; it has no sympathy with social innovators. We live in such constant need of each other's aid, that we dare not offend each other's prejudices; so that even those amongst us who most keenly feel that a radical change in the dress of men is absolutely necessary, and that its originator would be a benefactor to the universe, do not venture to offer an example. Yet surely we all must recognise that the nineteenth century is an epoch of appalling frightfulness; that the gentlemen who now have their portraits proudly painted in tail-coats and white cravats will be objects of contumely to their grandsons; and that their successors will be utterly unable to comprehend that a generation which was so inventive in politics, in science, and in the details of material progress—which was seemingly so full of liberty of thought—should have had no liberty of action, and should have silently supported the outrageous despotism of ugliness.

We shrink from change because we pretend that it would indicate vanity and affectation, and that the frank adoption of external ornament would be unworthy of the manly natures of our time. But we overlook two facts: the first, that, with all our fancied manliness, we Europeans of to-day do pay

singular attention to our vestments, abominable as they are; the second, that when men did dress well, they were quite as much men as we are, and perhaps a little more so. The Mousquetaires of Louis Treize wore the most perfect clothes which the world has ever seen; Condé, Raleigh, Henri Quatre, the Cavaliers, were models of costume; but it would be difficult to pretend that they were not gallant soldiers and real men. There is no necessary connexity between effeminacy and graceful dress; there is no inherent unworthiness in the pursuit of outward charm by men; and though so many of us proclaim that the adornment of male bodies is an object beneath our care, there is no argument to be found in history or in morals in favour of that pretension. Still, however false the theory, there it is. It holds us and it binds us. Its first result is to make men odious to contemplate; its second consequence is to limit the application of the word "dress." In considering the influence and the *rôle* of dress in France, we can speak of women only; men are outside the question for the present.

But though we are thus obliged to eliminate half a people from our field of observation, there still remains enough—too much, indeed—to talk about. Women's dress has become of late years one of the great questions of our time; it ranks with poor-laws, emigration, separation between Church and

State, and universal suffrage. It has not yet assumed, as those subjects have, the character of a national or political problem; the attention of Governments has not yet been avowedly directed to it; but its effects have been enormous, its influence has been all-pervading, its importance is really graver than that of many measures which Parliaments discuss. The absolute exclusion of the male half of the community from direct participation in outside ornament has led the men to gratify their pent-up vanity, their unsatisfied ideas of taste, by excessive adornment of their women. Vanity must come out somehow; taste—be it good or bad—must have its say; so, as men are limited to the eminently insufficient satisfactions which modern tailors offer them—to the choice between two buttons or one button on their sleeves, to trousers rather loose or very loose—they burst out in their wives and daughters, and seek in them what they are forbidden to enjoy in their own proper persons. The women have no objection to this system—on the contrary, their monopoly is peculiarly agreeable to them; but it would be unjust to attribute to them the whole blame of the excesses which actual Europe, from France downwards, offers to our eye. Men have asked for these excesses, have stimulated them, have admired them; for the theory that women dress for women, and men

for men is an illusion: women dress to please, and to please men more than women. They have used their opportunity with audacious recklessness, but the opportunity was created for them, they did not invent it all alone; men have helped them eagerly, and cannot escape the responsibility of their acts. They may, however, reasonably invoke extenuating circumstances; they may point to their own miserable condition, and ask if their eyes are to receive no satisfaction anywhere; they may say that they are poor weak creatures, full of frailties, and that they find enjoyment in the contemplation of smart clothes on women, because they cannot admire them on themselves. They do deserve some excuse, in the origin of their action at all events. Their longing for a pleasanter sight than they present themselves was natural and even praiseworthy; but when once they had pushed women on the road, they lost all control over them; women got away and culminated in the mad elegance, the wild extravagance which distinguished the Second Empire, and which aided in some degree to bring about the rottenness of France.

We should not, however, forget that the dressing of Frenchwomen has a good many aspects. We see the more riotous elements which compose it, because, by their very nature, by the publicity which they seek, they are visible to all spectators; and

because the harm which they have done is the talk of Europe. But there are other sides to this large subject: it is not all vanity, frivolity, and expense; it contains intelligence, and tact, and economy, and sense, and art, in their most curious developments; it is a mixture of good and bad, of foolishness and wisdom, in all their varying shades. But its action, whatever be its form and consequences, is omnipresent; scarcely any Frenchwoman escapes from it. Dress, in some way, is generally her main preoccupation, and that is why the matter has grown so big; why it has risen to the front rank amongst the questions of the moment. This sort of language is not exaggerated, though it looks so, and it is applicable more or less to other countries besides France. The desire to be admired, to produce personal effect through the covering of their bodies, is a prevalent disposition amongst women of European origin. In England it has attacked the lower classes with singular ferocity and with the most deplorable results; in France and elsewhere its manifestations have occurred mainly in the higher strata of society. The feeling which prompts it is, however, identical in all cases—the satisfaction of individual vanity and the longing to attract men—but its practical working out in France has a character of its own which we discover nowhere else.

The Frenchwoman has a sentiment of shape and

colour, of varieties and fitnesses, which is proper to herself, and which women of other races do not attain, unless by rare exception. She has an instinct of singular precision in everything which relates to dress; her faculty of comparison is marvellously rapid; her innate sense of the laws of harmony in outward things rises to the level of a science. And the word science is employed here in its purest meaning, as significative of knowledge which has been controlled and systematised by the application of method. It is not a haphazard feeling; it is a resolute conviction. It is not an accident of momentary experience; it is an infused faith, matured and verified by patient study, thought, and observation. Readiness of decision, facility of execution, are the first consequences of this state of mind; there is no hesitation about choice, no uncertainty in selection; the thought is so well prepared beforehand that the most complicated difficulties are disposed of with unerring sureness, and that apparently impossible solutions are attained as if by instinct. And these solutions are aided by a handiness of fingering, a dexterity of touch, which also are peculiar to the race, and which render possible the incarnation of fantastic fancies which heavier manipulators could never realise. Starting with weapons such as these, served by both head and hand, the Frenchwoman has reached a type of dress which others may strive

to imitate but which they do not realise. It is not enough to copy; possession of the self-same objects does not suffice; they must be put on, they must be worn, as their inventors wear them. Here, again, comes in a local virtue which cannot be transplanted: the art of carrying dress is almost purely French; not one Englishwoman in a hundred thousand can disguise her nationality behind foreign clothes; the indefinable peculiarities which early teaching gives are beyond her reach. She may struggle, but she fails; and although she may be quite convinced that she looks the part she wants to play, the least practised eye detects the sham.

But the mere fact of her would-be imitation involves a conscious recognition of the superiority of the type imitated; we only copy what we really like and what we are desirous to resemble. There are Englishwomen who pretend to repel with scorn the notion that they wish their dress to be mistaken for that of Frenchwomen; but if their assumed denial were real and honest, they would not expose themselves to the necessity of making it; they would say that Englishwomen are themselves, not other people; they would create a model for their own use, peculiar to the land, and though they would gain nothing by the process—for nationally they have no idea of dress—they would at all

events escape the charge of counterfeiting. It would be no joy to men if they were to do so; the eye would receive no contentment; our women would be even more abominably got up than they are at present; but we should have the virtuous satisfaction of independence, whatever that may be. Another and a far more practical solution would be to candidly avow that though we long to dress our wives well, we have not the faintest conception how to set about it, and that, consequently, we openly and frankly follow the most perfect type we can discover, acknowledging our incapacity of both production and imitation, but doing our little best to atone for our self-recognised inferiority, by the humble avowal of its existence, and by the obedient acceptance of a pattern. That pattern exists in France, not amongst the rapid people who have made for themselves so unenviable a reputation, but in another and a larger category of true women, who regard their toilet as a legitimate source of charm, as a natural indication of their individual sentiment of art. Those are the women who are good to look at and to follow; for though they do love *chiffons*—though they do devote to their discussion a considerable portion of their time and thoughts—though they, too, like the rest, lift up dress to the altitude of a great question,—they do it well and wisely, in a form and with a

result that others may be proud to emulate. It is only by dividing the subject into two distinct parts, that the truth can be arrived at; fast dressing makes up one side of it, good dressing makes up the other: in their moral consequences, as well as in their material aspects, the two are entirely different.

Not very long ago nearly all French women were *distinguées;* the social influences of the Restoration, and of Louis Philippe's reign, were mainly pure and honest, and they showed out in women's dress with singular completeness. There was something in the air then which led the French to put grace and charm above all other attributes. On the one hand there was no rowdiness; on the other, there was nothing of what we understand by aristocracy—indeed that peculiar denomination seems to belong exclusively to what are called the fair-haired races, particularly to the English, the Austrians, and the Swedes—but there was something quite as good, there was distinction. The women knew it, and they cherished their rare merit with infinite care and fondness. To look *comme il faut* was their one dream; and though the exact form of realisation of the phrase varied naturally from year to year with the fluctuations of passing fashion, the object and the result remained the same. And both were reached without

expense; simplicity was the rule, and simplicity means economy. That was the time when nearly everybody wore merinos in the winter, and plain muslin in the summer; when the only extravagance which women perpetrated was in their *chaussure*, their linen, and their gloves; and, delicate as was the dressing of the hands and feet, it did not cost much then. The revival of Imperial Government brought in abundant money, easy pleasures, and all the excitements and needs of stimulants which are proper to periods of moral decadence. Distinction ceased to satisfy the ambitions of a society which wanted glare, which had grown beyond the calm of moderate and purely feminine contentments, which claimed to show its wealth and its bad taste in action, no matter how. So a new type arose; the woman of the Second Empire replaced the quiet elegant Parisienne who was identified with the Monarchy of July; in came *toilettes tapageuses*, and high-heeled boots, and nakedness, and riotous expenditure. Art-lovers and wise men stood by and mourned.

Not that Frenchwomen's love of dress sprang up in 1852—it was an old, long-cherished worship, deep and faithful; it simply changed its gods with the new master. Its intensity did not grow, for it was already so profound and real that it could scarcely gather farther strength, but it modified its

ends and ways; from a winning perfectness made up of true female graces and of intelligent applications of the most ordinary means, it swelled into "*Benoitonism.*" That one word marked the period; it signified the abandonment of simplicity and of tranquil elegance; it indicated the pursuit of loud effects, in which eccentricities of form and colour were the sole elements; it implied an interior moral state in harmony with outside manifestations of such a nature. The change was not, however, universal; it was met by indignant protests, by heart-rending lamentations, by bitter criticisms, by satire, mockery, and organised opposition. And yet it rolled along, augmenting from year to year, gaining always fresh adherents, but never conquering a majority. It shocked too many old convictions, and it cost too much to become a nationally accepted movement; it was but an accident of the epoch, born of evanescent causes, and destined to fade away with them. It was limited to certain classes and to certain places, it never stained out on to the entire population; but, in its relatively restricted sphere of action, it did prodigious harm, and exercised a corrupting influence which has never been exactly measured.

A certain set of women, who, though not numerous, occupied positions so conspicuous and so influential that everything they did was seen and

much of it was copied, organised their diversions, their manners, and their dress in a way which, till their time, had never been practised either in or out of France. The peculiar circumstances of the moment rendered their proceedings possible, and not only disposed but materially enabled a good many other women, of lower social rank, to imitate them. The outlay which their extravagance entailed was good for trade; a special category of manufacturers sprang up to minister to their needs, and to earn large profits by their folly. So far their doings had a use, for it would be absurd to complain that rich people spend their money and so contribute to general prosperity. If Mr Worth, for instance, has made a fortune out of the wants which he supplied, he deserves the credit of having intelligently understood his time, and of having been the first to satisfy a new demand. He has no responsibility in the matter; he happened to possess certain natural gifts of a peculiar kind; he was able to invent prodigious dresses with a fertility, a variety, an audacity, and a skill which no one else possessed in the same degree; so the women who wanted dresses of that description came to him. Finding that the current had set his way, he asked prices which represented two separate sorts of goods, material and invention: his rivals could only execute, he was able to create;

he naturally claimed to be paid for both, and the world he served accepted his conditions. It is correct to say "the world," for two-thirds of all Worth's productions have been absorbed by foreigners. The Americans especially have been his largest customers. It is necessary to state this, so that the blame of giving £50 for a plain costume or £200 for a ball-dress may not be attributed to Frenchwomen alone. The truth is, as may easily be ascertained by a little inquiry in the right places, that the great providers of the various details of toilet who cluster round the Rue de la Paix—the makers not only of inconceivable gowns, but of fairy bonnets, admirable jewels, dreamy *chaussures*, and the other thousand delicacies which contribute to make up the modern woman—all work more for the United States and Russia than for France. There are ladies at St Petersburg who spend £120 a-year in shoes alone—whose annual outlay for gloves and stockings would keep six families of weavers—who think it quite natural to pay the journey of their favourite author from the Boulevard to the Newsky Prospect, in order that he may exactly take their measure for a corset. In abusing Frenchwomen for their extravagance—as we all do so willingly—let us be honest enough to remember that not one of them attains the height of folly which is reached by certain ladies whose names

it is not necessary to mention, but who are well known on the borders of the Neva and the Hudson, and of whose bills in Paris curious stories might be told, if discretion did not bar the way.

The sin of France lies in the fact that she sets the example : her imitators—some of them at least —go beyond the pattern which she offers ; but the original fault is hers. The defect is, however, rather ancient : it was not a product of the Second Empire. Europe has appropriated French fashions for so many centuries that it is difficult to determine when she began to do so. Furthermore, France is so prodigiously indifferent on the subject, her women care so little whether other women copy them or not, that they cannot be accused of any wilful desire to lead astray the nations round them. Frenchwomen dress for France alone ; if others follow them, that is their own affair ; the fact scarcely constitutes in itself a ground for blame against the original models. But still, if extravagance and bad taste are applied amongst the French, the harm they do is all the more extensive because of the vast field of action which they influence, and that is why their indirect responsibility is great and real. Of course they repudiate it with indignation ; of course they say that as they impose their will on no one, as all the women of the earth are free to cover themselves as they like,

it is most unfair to impute to them the tumultuous dressing which has grown up in so many countries during the last twenty years. The objection is specious, but insufficient; whether they like it or not, monarchs must accept the consequences of their position. France is the acknowledged Queen of dress, and, as such, she cannot escape from the duties and the charges which surround all crowns. That her outlying subjects are voluntary slaves is true—that she claims no authority over them is perfectly exact; but those facts do not efface the moral responsibility which attaches to all those who stand in high places, and have thereby become accepted models. So long as Frenchwomen were what they used to be thirty years ago, they did their duty to themselves and to humanity—they offered an example of perfect dress, and so bore usefully the burden of their royalty; but when they began to fling aside the wise precepts of their mothers, when they introduced mere money into the composition of their effects, when grace and charm were regarded as inferior ends, when their one object was to dazzle and bewilder, then they ceased to deserve the place which they had so long held; they became a danger, and ought to have been dethroned. But they held their sceptre by divine right; their vassals never thought of getting up a revolution to depose them; the slaves con-

tinued to obey—they followed on with unfatigued servility, as the populace of Rome bowed down before the Cæsars.

It is, however, in its French results, rather than in its outside bearings, that the movement of women's clothes since 1852 interests us here. It is its influence on France that we have to consider. It may at once be said that that influence was infinitely less extensive and less serious than has generally been supposed. The outbreak of exaggeration was so violent in certain classes of society that, by its mere glitter, it seemed to be vastly more important and more widespread than it was in fact. Its vivid glare gave it a character of universality which it never really possessed; its appearance of omnipresence was deceptive, and was brought about solely by the excessive publicity of the goings-on of its promoters. If the women who resolutely adopted fast dressing could have been counted, it is probable that not fifty thousand of them would have been found in the whole of France. But they made noise enough for five millions, and so misled the lookers-on, who fancied that such a *tapage* could not possibly be the work of a small set of people, and who therefore, not unnaturally, perhaps, ascribed its production to the entire nation. The truth is, as has been already said, that the example was first given by a few ladies who liked

strong amusements, whose rank and social power enabled them to externally defy opinion and to rely on being obsequiously imitated by the group immediately around them. But the real women of France resisted the attempt at its outset; they saw no gain to taste or charm in the ways which the Second Empire inaugurated; they persistently opposed them; and when, ten years afterwards, the evil had reached its climax, they who had in no way contributed to it shook their heads and sadly said, "A curious book will some day be written on the harm which Madame A. and her belongings have done to France." They expressed this opinion with conviction, for they thought the ill laid deep: they, like all the rest of the spectators, believed that the contagion had laid hold of the majority, and that its consequences would be durable. This, however, was an illusion; rapid dresses and rowdy ways (which seemed to have become a system), disappeared with the state of things which caused them; their life was ephemeral; they did much damage while they lasted, but their time is over: Frenchwomen are becoming themselves once more.

And yet the movement was accompanied by features which gave it an appearance of vitality and force, and contributed to deceive even the most experienced judges of social follies. It had a litera-

ture of its own; it had Feydeau's novels, Sardou's plays, and that peculiar newspaper the 'Vie Parisienne.' It was backed up by money, by Court favour, by the most exciting forms of pleasure, by a good deal of sharp writing, by the personal action of men and women of position. It succeeded in thoroughly depraving public taste within the limit of its action. The toilets of the actresses of the Gymnase, the Variétés, and the Vaudeville were accepted topics of conversation; Jules Janin—the critic, the judge, the thinker—wrote *feuilletons* upon them in the gravè 'Débats,' and did not seem to recognise that he thereby degraded his pen and his reputation. The fancy balls at the Affaires Etrangères and the Ministry of Marine were such big events that they absorbed attention a month before and afterwards; stories were eagerly told and listened to about duchesses and princesses who took tea with Mr Worth at five o'clock to discuss the last details of the composition of their costumes, and who drove back to him at 10 P.M. on their road to the entertainment, in order to submit their adornments to one final touch from his skilful hand. As skirts grew longer, bodies grew shorter; and the first half of Levassor's description of a ballet-girl's dress, "Une robe qui ne commence qu'à peine et qui finit tout-de-suite," became exactly applicable to the upper part of what was called

an evening toilet. Some people, indeed, were inclined to think that it was an exaggeration to pretend that it "scarcely began," and that it would have been far more exact to assert that it did not begin at all.

It was a curious period. The pursuit of material satisfactions, of the glorification of vanity, was the main object of the women who dressed and of the men who hung about them. The women spent all they had, and a good many got copiously into debt; faces were laboriously and pinctorially prepared for the day's work; the stinginesses of nature were more than ever compensated by various devices adapted to various parts of the body—before, behind, above, below; somebody else's hair, added to wadding and heels, composed a charming creature. The clothes which were put over these under preparations were violent in form and colour; all the ordinary theories and rules of art were wilfully disregarded; velvet was worn in summer—green, yellow, and red were resolutely mixed. Luxury reached so furious a development that even M. Dúpin—who, after serving thirteen governments with unvarying fidelity, might have been supposed to be able to stand a good deal—burst out in the Senate with a moral speech against the women of his time; but the ladies it was meant for read it in the 'Moniteur' next morning,

laughed, and said, "Poor old Dupin!" That was what he got for his trouble. It needed a stronger hand than his to stop the wave. And yet, with all this noise and splashing, the wave did not really hold much water; it was made up of surface foam. It seemed to cover almost the entire sea of society, but it had no depth, and even its superficial area was vastly less than was supposed. The majority of women are good and innocent, and are more inclined to the discharge of quiet duties than to the pursuit of reckless pleasure; it was but a minority—a small minority—which went in for joy and dress, and adopted them as the sole object of existence. Of course a good many of the quiet wives and mothers were a little tempted by the glitter round them; they would not have been Frenchwomen if they had been quite insensible to the glory of other people's clothes: but their good sense and their innate love of honesty protected them from danger; they stood by in safety; they went on dressing mildly, and limited their outlay to what their husbands gave them. There are, however, enough "frisky matrons" and foolish virgins on this earth to supply material for any madness which fashion may set going. There are abundant asses among the men that modern civilisation has produced who are always ready to applaud excesses, even if they have to pay for

them. So, with example from above and imitation from below, rowdy dressing and rowdy manners became typical of the period, and will be long remembered as having constituted one of its worst social aspects.

Not that the members of the group who dressed immensely were morally much worse than the people who live for pleasure in other lands. There is a singular equality in the dissemination of vice and virtue. The accidents of exterior development which come and go with every generation affect but little more than mere externals; they do not exercise any real influence on the inner condition of a nation, unless, indeed, they last long enough to acquire a permanent hold of its thought and action. Women who seek solely for diversion are not likely anywhere to do their duty to their children; and whether they be English, French, or Russian, their neglect of home duties is probably everywhere the same. Worldliness, whatever be its form, is not a peculiarity of a race or of an epoch; frivolity, vanity, and lust of the eyes have been pretty general since the world was made, and it would be untrue and unjust to describe them as monopolies of the women of the Second Empire. But, however founded this reservation may be, those women did go singularly far in the pursuit of contemptible enjoyments; they did

their very utmost to damage their generation by destroying the higher objects of society; and if women of other countries do the same in varying degree, that fact does not excuse the Parisians for setting the example.

Perhaps, however, the men merit more blame than the women, for the latter are only what the former make them. It is a question of supply and demand: when men want ladies round them, women become ladies: when men want the other thing, women become the other thing. They model themselves according to the requirements of their masters, and the fluctuations of their type and manners may always be taken as a tolerably safe indication of the male tendencies of the period. Men have therefore but small right to complain if the result be bad; it is mainly their own work: they deserve credit if the end is worthy; they must take the greater part of the responsibility if it be the contrary. It is they who have lifted up *cocottes* into the detestable prominence which they occupy in Paris; it is they who have led other women to suppose that the *cocotte* aspect is the one which pleases men, and which all women whose desire is to please must necessarily pursue. We foreigners may attribute all this folly to the women who perpetrate it; but that is unfair: the greatest sinners are the men who ask for it. Women follow

and obey far more than they originate. Of course this argument applies to the principle alone, and does not reach the details: there men are outside the question; they have no hand in the compilation of grotesque adornments; they like them, but they do not invent them. They may not wish their wives to spend £4000 a-year apiece on clothes, but they pay the bill because its very bigness flatters them; it is a merit in their eyes to have a wife who costs so much. This is a consequence, exaggerated and absurd, but still a consequence of the ugliness to which they are themselves condemned: when men become able to dress themselves with freedom they will feel less pride in overdressing the women around them.

The effect of these extravagances has necessarily been to almost destroy family life for the people who have indulged in them. There are women in France—a good many, too—who dress only for their husbands and their firesides, who think that they do their duty to God and themselves in trying to make their homes attractive to their proprietors, and who imagine rightly that they serve that purpose by adorning their own persons for the greater delectation of legitimate spectators. But the quick-living ladies, who, until a short time ago, existed for the world at large, did not content themselves with any such restricted field of action. One ad-

mirer did not satisfy their eager minds; they went in for multitude, and adopted means which were as large as the end they had in view. That some of them really liked their husbands, and had a sort of tenderness for their children, is not at all impossible; but as it is extremely difficult to associate indoor love with outside vanities, the former was pretty often abandoned in order to be better able to attend to the latter. It would be particularly useless to draw harrowing pictures of worldliness, and of the damage which it has done to family joys in France, for its effects are pretty much the same in all the capitals of Europe. Piccadilly can tell us as much about it as we can learn in the Champs Elysées. We all perfectly well know what it looks like and what it produces, only it is infinitely pleasanter to abuse it in the French than in ourselves. It is very soothing to discuss the mote in our brother's eye; so we go in at the iniquities of France, as if we were all purity and virtue on this side. It is true that the Parisiennes do encourage us to this sort of action, for they have always exposed their faults to the universe with a frankness and a completeness of which we can discover no example elsewhere. Other people cover themselves with hypocrisies and sham; but as the "nation de trop de paroles" does not seem, in this respect at least, to care what its neighbours think, it shows itself as

it is. Socially there is very little humbug and scarcely any snobbishness in France. There is no recognised upper class to struggle after or to imitate. Great as are the demerits of the country in its politico-moral developments, it is singularly free from the disposition either to revere and copy rank, or to veil its own passing tendencies. We see the French pretty nearly as they are; the good and the bad in them come out with full distinctness; and that is one of the reasons why it is so delightfully easy for us superior people to call them hard names.

The bad, however, was so terribly prominent amongst the riotous society of the ante-Sedan period, that there is really some excuse for insisting on it. Since the Regency the world has not seen such a wilful apotheosis of pleasure as those twenty years produced; and of all the external forms which the movement assumed, women's dress was the most marked and the most evident. Whether that dress was a cause or a result is rather difficult to determine; but its action, though limited to a certain set, was as great, within its sphere, as that of any other of the deleterious springs which were at work. It is true that there was an amusing side to the question; but so there is to the history of a good many other of the damaging influences to which life is exposed. It is true that the pictures of contemporaneous society with which the 'Vie

Parisienne' stimulated every Saturday the appetites of its readers were extremely clever and abundantly diverting. It is true that the realities, the actualities, of daily talk and daily ways, were often provocative of much laughter (more than France hears now); but after all, laughter may be bought at too high a price—and so it was in those times. Brightness and gaiety are cheering and tempting ends to follow, especially when life is young; but they are none the less real if they are innocent and not too dear. The Second Empire, however, was not particularly innocent, and no one will accuse it of having led to cheapness. It broke down the honest and wise social traditions which preceded it; it enthroned extravagance; it lowered both men and women; and one of its active agents towards these results was the style of dress which it inaugurated.

But whatever may have been the degree of moral harm which was thus generated, it was, relatively, less conspicuous than the odious corruption of taste and type which grew up during those twenty years. Regarded as a form of art—and it certainly ought to be so considered—women's dress is a manifest indication of current ideas on form and colour. It does not constitute a mere accidental ornament of the body. It is not limited to the expression of personal conceptions, or sentiments of fitness

(though that is the very best development which it can assume in individual cases); it is, or ought to be, taken as a whole, an outward sign of the art tendencies of an epoch. Not of art in the restricted sense which so many of us attribute to the word—the narrow art of pictures, and of statues, and of sculpture—but the art of universal harmonies of shapes and tints which nature shows us how to realise, and which, at many periods of the world's history, men and women have felt and followed. This is the art which so disposes objects round us that each presents the highest form which it is susceptible of attaining, and produces in us the keenest satisfactions which the eye can convey. This is the art through which home adornment in furniture, in dress, achieves the end of rendering life pleasanter, and of showing us how great results can be obtained by little means, how truth and delicacy and taste can be insensibly inculcated by the daily sight of the things we live with. The fashions of the Empire offered no such teaching; glare and eccentricity were their distinguishing characteristics; they did not contain one sign of the higher views which the choice of dress ought always to pursue; they were excessive in every detail, especially in cost. The caricatures of the period will hand down to posterity a tolerably correct knowledge of what the streets and drawing-

rooms of Paris looked like between December 1851 and September 1870. French grandchildren will indeed mock at the aspect of the women we have known, at their crinolines four yards round, replaced five years later, by narrow skirts clinging round their legs. They will recognise in them what they really were, "des femmes remplies de bijoux et d'elles-mêmes," with small room for love of other people, and with a permanent disposition to disobey all the rules which ought to guide the choice of feminine costume. When all possible varieties of form had been exhausted, the ladies of the period took up colour, and if Germany had not intervened, they would soon have worn out colour too, and have had nothing left to choose from. The reaction which has now set in is against all colour; women are wearing tints which have no name, which never were real or fresh or true, but which still do not quite reach the tone which we design by "faded;" they are essentially "des couleurs provisoires," as Paris calls them, in sympathy with the sort of government which France just now possesses, neither Monarchy nor Republic, neither reality nor fiction, neither seed nor flower. It really is amusing to see dress thus fit itself to the accidents of politics. From respectable under Louis Philippe, it became turbulent under the Empire, and has now turned to "provisional" under M. Thiers. Whatever be

its next stage, we may, at all events, be sure that it will never grow "definitive." Its essence is to change, not only with dynasties, but with all the passing fancies which caprice may set afloat. It is as well that it should be so, for if the fashions of the Empire had lasted, there would have been an end of all elevated taste in France; such treatment would have suffocated it. Let us remember, however, that an exact measure of the style of a period can scarcely be arrived at by contemporaries; prejudice and habit blind us too much to allow us to exercise discriminating judgment on objects which surround us all day long. We can recognise the superiority of the toilet of both men and women during the epoch which stretched from the thirteenth to the sixteenth Louis; we can all see how ungraceful dress was under the Valois, the Directory, and the First Empire; but we cannot form an equally sure opinion with reference to ourselves, partly because we are accustomed to what we live with, partly because the differences which arise from year to year involve only modifications of mere detail, with no marked change of character or type. As yet, although we can only compare together the trifling contrasts which we have witnessed at different moments of our generation, we can, at all events, give a verdict on them as between themselves, and can, within that limit, assign to the ephemeral

fashions of the reign of Napoleon III. their little place in history. A detestably bad one it is. Rarely has the theory of dress assumed a less satisfactory expression than during those twenty years amongst the women who, whether we like it or not, we must take as typical of the time. Rarely has a momentary rush of extravagance, in all its forms, exercised a worse influence, artistically, on those who were subjected to it.

It is scarcely necessary to offer any arguments in proof of this; but if there should still be people who, by long custom (they can have no better motive), should wish to defend the piece in which they have played a part, let them explain—if they can—the merit of a system which was based on nothing but the deification of money. Since the Byzantines put gold and silver into pictures, and called the product art, we have had no similar example of the adoration of mere glitter. Happily it is over; and if the Empire should get back—which is an eventuality not to be disregarded—we may presume that it will not repeat the error, but will offer another model to its restored subjects.

But even the Empire did not crush out the true Frenchwoman; she lived through it, unaffected by bad examples; she maintained the old tradition in silent corners; she is now coming out again in her ancient wisdom; she is once more showing Europe

what a woman's dress ought to symbolise. Her principle always has been that the brightest forms, the most admirable results, are attainable by the simplest means, and that they are utterly independent of the fictitious splendours which bank-notes pay for. She has not abandoned the great theory that women should be women always; that when they drift to rowdiness they lose their charm; that distinction is the one end worth struggling for. And here it should be noticed that distinction is not, necessarily, a pure gift of nature. Its highest manifestations are, of course, dependent on physical conditions which no employment of intelligence, however cunning, can thoroughly replace; but intelligence can do a vast deal to atone for corporeal insufficiencies, and, as regards dress alone, it is the one guide to perfectness. But intelligence, in this case, means wisdom, tact, and common-sense, as well as the able manipulation of form and colour. It means suitableness in everything—in the choice of substances and shapes and tints which fit the social condition of the wearer as well as her personal aspect. It means not only the pursuit of a harmonious whole, but the diligent appropriation of all the smaller delicacies of detail which true women ought to practise, so that every element of their dress may support critical examination, so that no "faults of spelling" may be discovered by

an investigating eye. And it means the realisation of all this with little money. This was what most Frenchwomen used to reach; this is what many of them have never forgotten; it is to this they are coming back. When they have done so thoroughly the world may safely copy them once more.

Our society is, however, so blind to art, so generally devoid of all perception of the immense results which may be produced by the will to please, that the highest forms of coquetry in dress are appreciated only by the few who have really studied the delicate science of attraction. Even amongst women there are not many who know their power, who recognise the influence they can wield by outward stimulants, who measure the true value and extent of the physical effects they can induce, who see within themselves how thoroughly they can rule the men around them by the mere strength of charm. And yet, of the many forces by which we act upon each other, the well-applied coquetry of woman is perhaps the most insidious. Not the miserable coquetry of idle vanity; not the unintelligent display of purposeless, senseless ornament; not the paltry effort to attract by means which everybody else employs,—but the thoughtful handling of well-calculated adornment, the scientific development of natural beauties, the skilful *mise en évidence* of each winning detail, so as to arouse

in lookers-on the utmost admiration they can give. Talent such as this is seldom found. But, here and there, as years go by, one meets a woman who merits memory, whose knowledge of profound subtleties and sweet seductions is complete, whose every movement is a charm, whose beauty seems almost perfect, because of the perfect frame she sets it in. In cases such as these—too rare, alas!—the hair, the feet, the hands, like all the rest, are used for the part they have to play; they live, and speak, and aid. Loveliness does not lie in the face alone, as we Islanders imagine; grace does not depend on features; charm is not a special property of eyes, mouth, and chin. The true woman thinks of every detail of her effect; nothing is too small for her attention. It is because the French recognise this principle of action that they excel so singularly in the grand art of pleasing, of which their dressing is an element.

But results so perfect cost some money; the average types of France do not attain them. It must not be forgotten that to a Frenchwoman of the middle class dress involves an expenditure of only £60 a-year: within that limit she can let her imagination travel; beyond it lie forbidden things. Now, considering that £60 is the price of one ordinary gown for certain other people, it is not easy to understand how Madame Somebody, whose hus-

band is a small barrister or a Government clerk, who owns two children, and whose entire annual income is £440, can be got up as she is. And yet she does it, and a vast number of her sort do it too with identical success. The result is seemingly out of all proportion with the means, but that is only an optical illusion. The £60 form but one detail in the means; we do not see the rest unless we look very closely for it; but when we have discovered the supplementary sources of action which contribute to the end produced, we are almost inclined to think that the £60 are a superfluity, and that the whole thing might just as well be managed without any money at all. Amongst the many employments of human ingenuity it would be difficult to select one in which inventiveness, resolute purpose, dexterity of treatment, and especially utilisation of the very smallest chances, are set to work with more persistence or more craftiness. There is assuredly no similar example of the victory which cleverness can win in battle against poverty. But triumph is attainable solely by personal action; in such a struggle nothing can be delegated to others; the author must do everything herself—not, perhaps the sewing, which is a merely mechanical act, but the devising, the arranging, the fitting, the ordaining, and more than all, the organising of the whole, so

that it may present unity of effect. Furthermore, as Frenchwomen of the class we are talking of are perpetually restoring their old clothes, and adapting them to new necessities, it is clear that no one else can serve them, for no one else knows what they possess. Their habit of directly governing their dress is not, however, peculiar to this or any other class. No Frenchwoman who respects her own opinion allows herself to be guided by a *couturière* or a *femme-de-chambre*. She lets them cut and sew, but she originates, knowing, by her instinct, that in no other way can she make her toilet what it ought to be—representative of herself. The main features of the dressing of the true Parisienne—of the woman who is always charming, despite her empty purse—are individuality, harmony, and finished detail.

It is very easy to talk about the process in this loose way; but it is almost impossible to describe it accurately, especially so as to enable others to try their hand at it. Both means and end are peculiar to France. The result is unattainable unless it be realised by the imagination before it is produced materially. To say "I will have a black silk dress" is an abstract proposition, containing no sort of specific meaning beyond that which strictly belongs to the words which form it. But to the true female mind, the phrase a "black silk dress" is sus-

ceptible of a thousand senses, particularly to women who, both by pecuniary necessity and by personal disposition, do not stumble, haphazard, into their clothes, but carefully weigh them out beforehand, and use much comparison. Their work is essentially one of choice and calculation, restricted, of course, in execution, by economy and by the accidents of individual talent, but absolutely limitless in general theory and idea. A black silk dress may assume almost as many forms as sunset clouds can offer. It is in selection between these forms—it is in the character and expression given to the product—that the idiosyncrasies of the wearer come to light, that the woman shows out herself, that the Parisienne stands alone. The gown is, however, but one element of the whole—the largest and most apparent, it is true, but far from the most important, for a cotton dress worth fifteen francs may speak up with equal power, and may proclaim with as loud a voice, the merit of its author. The gloves, the sash, the hat, the parasol, the *chaussure*, and the linen above all, subscribe more largely still to the tone and type of a well-dressed woman : it is to them that the experienced eye turns curiously in order to determine the exact degree of her perfection in this branch of merit. No one who really knows and feels what dress ought to imply will limit observation to a skirt ; the dissection will be

rapid but complete; it will extend to every detail —hands, feet, hair, and under-garments, will each receive a scrutinising glance, and opinion will be formed on the assemblage of them all, not on any single element. In Paris, and elsewhere in France, there are crowds of women who come out reproachless from these ruthless examinations, the reason being that they know beforehand that they will be subjected to them, and prepare accordingly. It is not amongst cunning artists such as these that one sees jewels worn in the early morning, or gloves with holes at the finger-ends like full-blown tulips, or stockings dangling round the ankles, twisted like the screw of a music-stool, or hanging helplessly like Turkish trousers. It is not they whose linen ever shows a stain, or who add coarse embroidery to their hidden vestments, or who pile on all they have, solely to show their property. Delicacy and fitness are their immediate means, harmony their object, perfection their final end; and they reach it.

These are true women in one of the most feminine senses of the title: it is they who brighten up so many homes in France—it is they who of late years have angrily resisted the barbarian onslaughts of money and bad taste—it is they who have preserved unweakened the traditions of their mothers —it is to them that we now should look for teach-

ing and example. But they do not think of us; their field of action is indoors. They do not care for foreign imitators; their work is done for themselves and their own children. Their girls grow up in contact with sound theories on dress, in constant practice of the intricate science of self-adornment, but with the conviction that its highest truths lie in simplicity, in the resolute avoidance of all violence, of all waste, of all unnecessary outlay. At fourteen years old, those girls can cut out their own dresses; at ten they could trim bonnets, and held forth learnedly on the theory exhibited in their mother's practice. Education such as this makes wonderfully handy women; they know how to use their fingers for pretty nearly everything. Skill in dress leads on to other skills; the sentiment of art in its personal applications opens out the mind to its larger teachings. Regarded from this point of view—which, though it may seem exaggerated to persons who hear of it for the first time, is incontestably sound—Dress acquires a new use; it ceases to be an exhibition of vanity, or of low-class ability; it takes its place amongst the useful elements of instruction; it helps women along the road to art-knowledge.

But, alas! this pretty picture does not apply to everybody. It is so pleasant that it is particularly disagreeable to turn away from it to the crowds of

utterly incompetent, blind-eyed, ordinary people, who are so terribly abundant in French departments, who are incapable of comprehending the most elementary of the laws of fitness; who wear leather boots with a muslin dress; stick cameo brooches in the middle of their chests, and accumulate feathers, flowers, and lace in resolute confusion —really just like Englishwomen. Sins of this kind do not shock them: the poor creatures do not see them; they suppose it is all right, and have no qualms of conscience. And yet, next door to them, there may be one of those perfect models we were talking of just now—a model with no students and no admirers, like that rose we heard of in our youth, which wasted its sweetness on the desert air. This seems to show that the faculty of rightly appreciating dress is either a natural gift or a result of early teaching; anyhow, it is probable that it is difficult to acquire in after-life, unless in rare cases and under special circumstances of example and assistance. It shows, also, that though the highest types of dressing are to be found in France, they are not a necessary property of the entire nation. They must be regarded as developments of a special capacity under favourable conditions rather than as an inherent right. The better class of Frenchwomen have grown slowly, with each other's help, to the

height which they have now attained; their talent has become transmissible to their children (Mr Darwin has not thought of that example of natural selection), but unequally and capriciously; they have not communicated it to the whole crowd round them, and the crowd remains incapable of imitation, or even of comprehension. It does not know how much a woman augments her power by a well-calculated use of carefully-selected ornament, or how a mother can help her child to acquire the appreciation of shape and colour by the study of her daily dress.

Regarded as one of the occupations which ought to fill up women's time at home, the preparation of well-chosen clothes is natural and legitimate. All the world cannot be rich enough to pass its time in pleasure or in intellectual pastimes; the mass of us spend our lives with less money than we should like to have, and in a consequent constant effort to diminish our impecuniosity by our labour. Men trade and speculate, and do various other things for this end; women, who, unless exceptionally, have no direct power of earning cash, can only try to satisfy their longings by indoor work for their own account. Foolish people, who think it beneath their grandeur to make their own gown and bonnets, are rare in France; there, even the richer

classes generally consider it to be a duty to help themselves to some degree, and to know, at all events, how to sew.

But whether or not it be admitted that the subject is susceptible of these accessory merits, most of us will own that a well-dressed woman is an agreeable thing to look at. We do not all agree as to what a well-dressed women is, and there is room for a pretty quarrel between the advocates of French and English views of the matter; but the principle remains unimpaired, even though its forms of realisation are open to discussion. Even in France itself, as we have seen, there has been a fight between two types; one of them is nearly suppressed at last, and the other one is slowly regaining its old supremacy: but we English people, after all, can regard the model only as an admirable curiosity; we are incapable of imitating it, for the same reason which prevents our learning how to cook—our women cannot do it.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARRIAGE.

ONE of the effects of the individual self-confidence which is so general an attribute of us Anglo-Saxons, is to incline us to face marriage without calculating its cost. We do it because it tempts and interests us at the moment, trusting to luck and to our strong arms for the means of keeping our wife and children. There is something manly and vigorous in this way of acting: of course it is rash and dangerous, of course it often leads to all kinds of worry, and it sometimes ends in downright misery; but there is a pluckiness about it which commends itself to our natures. Political economists and philosophers go on attacking it with unavailing arguments and unconvincing proofs. Right as they may be in theory, they do not influence our practice; "improvident marriages" are as numerous as ever. We are not a prudent people in this respect, and neither earnest books nor eloquent discourses are likely to change our

tendencies. Most of us believe, in varying degrees, in our own innate power of overcoming obstacles as they arise. We do not shrink from matrimony because it may involve us in risks and difficulties; we rush at it because it attracts us at the moment, and because we are surrounded by crowds of people who have done the same before us, and have struggled somehow through the consequences of their hurry or their error.

The process of the French, on this point as on so many others, is an absolute contradiction with our own. Where we decide and act, they weigh, and calculate, and hesitate, and consider. They reach no resolve until they fancy they have exhausted the measurement of advantages and disadvantages, until they have pondered over probabilities and possibilities, until they imagine they have united as many elements of success as human foresight can collect. It can scarcely be said that even in England marriage is regarded as a purely personal arrangement, concerning only the two immediate parties to it. We admit, in our upper classes at least, that it involves considerations of a varied nature, which justify and sometimes even require the intervention of parents and families. But the French carry this intervention to a length which we could not support: they leave no liberty and no action to the coming couple: the whole

thing is taken out of their hands: they are treated as if they were incompetent in the question: their parents undertake the negotiation for them, and handle it as governments deal with international treaties. Glaringly evident as are the emotionality and the mobility of the French in other phases of their conduct, they have no application here. They find their use abundantly in superficial sentiments, in the forms and thoughts and words of outside existence, in the manifestation of already existing affections; but, with rare exceptions, they have nothing to do with the preparation of a marriage. Their place is taken, on that one occasion, by a dry, arithmetical computation of practical results, with no excitement and with no distractions. Where we so ordinarily listen to what we understand by love, to the temptations of the young heart in all their forms (however transitory), to our individual impressions and to our own opinions, the French consult fitnesses of relative situation, reciprocities of fortune and position, and harmonies of family intercourse. They seek to insure the future, in some degree, in its social as well as its pecuniary forms. They lay it down that passion is no guide to permanent satisfaction, and that other people than the two directly interested have, both in law and reason, a right of judgment in so grave a case.

This does not absolutely mean that pre-existing sympathies are considered to be unnecessary for marriage in France; but it does mean, in the distinctest language, that such sympathies alone are not admitted there as a sufficient motive for an association which is to last till death. Sympathies wear out sometimes; new ones grow up from other contacts; eternal attachments are very rare between people who have not managed to get married, and have not the aid of the wedded tie to hold them steadily together: but the necessities of life never fade away; they never weaken; they remain in force with pitiless persistence, and French parents pay more attention to them than to what may be only a passing inclination in their sons and daughters.

And it must be borne in mind that this view of marriage is not solely a development of the national disposition towards prudence; it is also, to some extent at all events, a consequence of the legal enactments contained in the Code Napoléon. The law forbids all marriages without either the consent of the father and mother, or proof that they are both dead. It is very troublesome to get married in France; the operation is surrounded by difficulties and formalities which would make an Englishman stamp with rage. It is true that if parents refuse to allow their children to follow

their own wishes, the latter are permitted, provided they have attained their majority, to go through a process called "a respectful summons to consent," after which, if the parents persist in their rejection of the appeal, marriage may be at last attained. No matter at what age a man or a woman marry, even if they are sixty, they must either produce the written consent of their father and mother, or show that they have applied for it in due legal form, and that it has been denied them without sufficient cause, or prove that they are orphans. The object of this legislation is not only to prevent bigamy (which, under such conditions, is naturally rare in France), but, even more, to maintain parental authority, and to insure a due subjection of children. So far there is something to be said in its favour, especially as, in many cases, it really does protect young people against their own folly. But as, after all, marriage is a complex state, requiring something more than a father's approbation to conduct it to success, it is natural that we, who regard the entire subject from a very different point of view, should have a good many objections to urge.

The question, however, is not merely one of legal forms and parental privileges; it contains a vast deal more besides. As marriage is the real starting-point of home life—as the happiness of

husbands, wives, and children depends, in a great degree, on the conditions under which it is realised and worked out—it is fair, and even necessary, to judge it not only in its beginnings and its organisation, but in its results as well. Indeed it would be rather difficult in such a case to consider causes without effects. We look instinctively from one to the other, and, half unconsciously, estimate the value of the commencement by the value of the end. But how are the results of marriage to be correctly measured? We all know how difficult it is to make a definite opinion for ourselves on the point even in the case of the friends with whom we live in constant intimacy, whose interiors we know in detail, whose quarrels, whose special sympathies, whose qualities and defects, we have had some means of testing. How then, if it be so hard a task to reach a conviction in the few cases round us, can we hope to form a judgment fairly applicable to an entire nation? Vague ideas are of no use here; prejudices mislead; facts are impossible to collect on so large a scale. And yet there is a guide—an incomplete and insufficient one, but still a safe one so far as it can lead us; that guide is the impression which a nation entertains about itself. If we consult it carefully we get the accumulated experience of the mass in the only form in which it manifests itself on such

a subject as this. There are no returns, no reports, no statistics to refer to; but there are drawing-room talks, and half-confidences, and village rumours, and the gossip of the market-place, and the wise head-shakings of the old people; and with their aid, if we listen closely, we can compose a tolerably approximate picture of what all these indications describe. But we can only do it fairly on condition of being scrupulously exact, of effacing from our memory all predisposition towards special shades and special forms, of marking down absolutely nothing of what our own imagination so easily suggests, and of strictly limiting our colouring to what we are quite certain that we distinctly see. And, even then, we have to reconcile bitter contradictions, to group together the most opposite results, to institute a comparison of causes.

But before we consider the evidence thus obtainable as to the moral results of marriage in France, it may be useful to cast a glance at the material comparison which it is possible to make between the quantity of marrying which takes place amongst the French, and the corresponding figures on the same subject which other nations offer. In his 'Eléments de Statistique,' M. Moreau de Jonnès gives a table of the number of marriages which are effected annually in the principal

countries of Europe. Ireland comes first, with 1 marriage for each 90 inhabitants; France is sixteenth, with 1 for 122; England twenty-seventh, with 1 in 137; Tuscany twenty-eighth and last, with 1 in 143. Now if this be true—and the well-known name of M. Moreau de Jonnès may be accepted as a guarantee for the exactness of the numbers—it seems to follow that, notwithstanding our headstrong imprudence, we English actually marry less, proportionately, than the prudent, calculating French, who look before they leap. This is an unexpected fact to start with; but, if it be a fact, it indicates, with tolerable distinctness, that the hesitations which precede all marriages in France do not really stop marriage, for the French stand in the middle of the table which has just been quoted—below the northern states, which (excepting England) head the list, but above all the southern races, which close it. The position thus indicated for France is the very one which would appear to be the most desirable to occupy; it is a fair average, showing neither too little nor too much. And France retains the same approximate position if we look backwards and carry the comparison into the eighteenth century. A hundred years ago, marriages were everywhere more frequent than they are now: subsistence was more easy to obtain; it was not so difficult to provide for

children; and we consequently find that the number of annual marriages, relatively to the then population, was, throughout Europe, about ten per cent above its present rate. But the diminution which has since occurred has been universal; it is not special to France or to any other land. The French continue to take wives in the same proportion as they have always practised towards their neighbours; they have diminished matrimony only as it has been diminished all around them.

If, however, they have held their own in the rate of marrying, they have diminished largely, since the Revolution, in the fecundity of marriage. In 1770 the children born in France were in proportion to the whole population 1 in 25; now they have come down to 1 in 35; the falling off has consequently reached the enormous figure of forty per cent. Here lies the real explanation of the strange fact which has so astonished Europe after each census recently taken in France—the fact that the French have almost ceased to increase in numbers. It is not, however, as a statistical curiosity that the subject is referred to here, but because it is most intimately connected with the entire question of French marriages, because it bears closely on their moral organisation, because it opens the door to considerations which would be almost incomprehensible if it were omitted. We will pre-

sently come back to it. Meanwhile we can leave dry figures and return to the more interesting study of opinions, impressions, and personal experiences.

The French are certainly convinced that they are a happy people. And so they are, if gaiety and cheeriness and mutual goodwill can be taken as satisfactory and sufficient evidence on the point. No nation has more laughter—neither Irishmen nor Negroes surpass them there; and it is generally good, honest laughter, resulting from a motive—not mere senseless giggling. But happiness and laughter are not synonymous; the latter is not necessarily a symptom of the existence of the former; the saddest of us may laugh sometimes, while the most thoroughly contented may be constitutionally inclined to gravity. It is not, then, on this one outward sign that either practically or logically the French can base their claim to be regarded as a really happy nation. If the claim be founded, the grounds on which it rests must be looked for elsewhere—in deeper, less superficial, and less apparent proofs. It is especially in their use of married life that the evidence, if really it exists, should be looked for and be found. And here it is that we must take up the testimonies alluded to just now and try to measure what they reveal to us. If marriage, as a rule, is found to produce success—if the

men and women that it brings together generally assert that they are satisfied with what they have extracted from it—if lookers-on, all round them, confirm their declarations, and tell us that their married friends, so far as they can judge them, have no home difficulties and no home regrets,—then we may, without imprudence, recognise that the French are really a happy people, and that the marriage system on which their home life is based, is proved to be well adapted to their character and their needs, for the simple reason that it leads them on to joy.

It may be said at once, subject to exceptions, explanations, and reservations, that this result is generally attained by the French; that they really are, indoors, a contented nation; and that their marriages, as a whole, present enviable results.

It may be as well, however, before going further, to attempt to give a definition of married happiness as it is sometimes comprehended and pursued in its highest form across the Channel. It is not always quite the same condition. It not unfrequently implies, amongst the educated classes, a ceaseless employment of intelligence and skill, such as we rarely know of here. The mass in France, of course, acts like the mass elsewhere; it takes life as it finds it; it "lets it rip," as the Americans say. It seeks no improvement; it crawls on with what

it has. But there is a theory of marriage which some French men and women understand and realise—a theory which not only leads them to distinguish the highest uses to which the married state may tend, but which enables them to detect the means by which those uses can be reached. In cases such as these, the life which two lead together becomes a constant, ever-growing pursuit of forms and shades of happiness which are beyond the thought, and even beyond the faculty of comprehension, of the crowd. The basis of their practice rests on the wise precept, that as our longings, our necessities, and our fancies, change with time and age, and with position too, the attempts we make to satisfy those longings and those fancies should vary their nature and their character in sympathy with the modifications which occur in the object to be attained. What pleases us at twenty, begins to lose its charm at thirty, and wearies us at forty. And if this be true of men, it is truer still of women, who, as a natural result of the home life they lead, are fatally condemned to aspire after variety of indoor emotions, because they can find none outside. The husband who has studied the philosophy of home happiness, who has entered marriage with a true sense of its dangers and its powers, will not wait for his wife to manifest fatigue. From the first hour of their common ex-

istence he will begin to teach her that the tie between man and woman cannot preserve its vigour and its first eager truth unless the elements which compose it are skilfully replaced and thoughtfully renewed as they successively wear out and gradually cease to produce their old effect. He will try to show to her, while she is still in the enthusiasm of early wedded joy, that happiness, like all other states—and perhaps even more than all the rest—is, by its very nature, but a passing, transitory condition; that what gave it to us yesterday may fail to create it for us to-day; that the sympathies which seem to us so ardent and so durable in the inexperience of our beginnings, will be but fading brightnesses if we do not watch over each fluctuation of their aspects, each faint symptom of their change. Young wives may hesitate when first such theories as these are laid before their astonished eyes: it causes pain to their earnest fondness of the moment to be assured that, according to the laws of probability, that fondness will not last unless new nourishment, new starting-points, new stimulants be provided for it as years pass on. But when once they have grown accustomed to the argument—when once they have been led to an appreciation of its unvarying and universal application—then, if they do love their husband truly, they become his active aid, his convinced

co-operator in the delicate but inestimable labour of maintaining in all its strength of origin, of developing to its fullest growth of perfectness, the first object of their united life—joint happiness.

And yet examples seem to indicate that frequently women do not possess the faculty of understanding the profound utility of this crafty handling of their lives. When once they have really grasped it, they are capable of contributing to the result with even more power than men; but their appreciation of the necessity of the effort is often sluggish, and, as a rule, they have to be dragged to it either by entreaty or necessity.

The general tendency of wives—in France as elsewhere—is to regard happiness as a vested right, as a natural fact, as a permanent condition, as a self-sufficing, self-maintaining state, which ought to go on and last because it has once begun. Most of them violently revolt the first time they are asked to own that married happiness may be, on the contrary, and by its very essence, the most ephemeral of all short-lived creations. They take man's love as a property and a due; they fancy that it is the husband's duty to keep up that love without any special aid from themselves. They let themselves be loved, but they do not help love to last; as Johnson said, "they know how to make nets, but not how to make cages." In cases such

as these—and, unfortunately, they constitute the majority of experiences in all lands—there is small hope of permanent contentment. If the husband is ignorant enough—as indeed the greater part of husbands are—to view the case exactly as the wife does,—to imagine that he can leave the future to take care of itself, and to allow the early rush of mutual satisfaction to struggle to its end, without providently preparing, in good time, the elements of the second act of married life,—then he reaches the usual emptiness and disappointment in ignorance of the causes which have produced them, and ends by regarding them as a natural consequence of matrimony. But if he is a thinking man, if he has given some of his attention to a calculation of the conditions necessary for the conservation of home delight, then he does indeed suffer if he finds himself tied for all life to a woman who is incapable of helping him to attain, by mutual labour and mutual watchfulness, that rare but admirable result—permanent and increasing joy in marriage.

In France there are certainly a good many people who rise to these higher views—who look on marriage as a serious occupation, which requires absorbing thought—who ceaselessly endeavour to improve its form, and to lift its consequences and its products above the level of humdrum existences. And often they succeed. Now success, in such a

case, implies that they distil, from contact with each other, a degree, an elevation, a thoroughness, a perpetuity, and a reality of happiness, which less able and less careful manipulators of home life are incapable of producing. They show us what skill and science can elaborate from ordinary sources; they show us the height of satisfaction to which we are capable of climbing, in the relation between man and wife, if we will but regard that relation as a plant to be sedulously cultivated, and not as a weed to be left to combat unaided for existence. Many an example might be given in support of this rough indication of what marriage may be when it is rightly understood. In the higher ranks of French society there are men who merit to be called professors of the art of happiness; who have analysed its ingredients with careful fingers and scrutinising eyes; who have consummated their experience of means and ends; who, like able doctors, can apply an immediate remedy to the daily difficulties of home life; whose practice is worthy of their theory, and who prove it by maintaining in their wives' hearts and in their own a perennial never-weakening sentiment of gratitude and love. But, alas! these cases are exceptions. Most French people content themselves, like their neighbours in other countries, with rumbling carelessly through marriage, making no attempt to improve it, and

not even suspecting that it is capable of improvement. And yet, thanks to their light, laughing natures, they generally keep clear of gloom. They bring into married life the bright cheeriness which is so frequently an attribute of their race; they stave off worry by *insouciance;* they support annoyances with a coolness which in their case is not indifference, but which, to an unpractised foreign eye, looks so singularly like it, that it is difficult at first to fix the point where calm patience appears to end and indifference seems to begin.

There are, however, contradictions in abundance to this rule of quietly supporting cares. Frenchmen have sometimes in their character so many of the faults which elsewhere are supposed to be the property of women only, that they are capable of growing fidgety and nervous to a scarcely credible degree; and woe to the unlucky wife who stumbles on a husband of that species!—he wears her out with teasing. Gentle and affectionate as the men ordinarily are, there are some among them who are absolutely intolerable at home. Luckily they form an infinitely small minority; otherwise it would be nonsense to pretend that French marriages, on the whole, are happy. The evidence which can be collected by listening to opinions, including ill-natured scandal in all its forms, tends certainly to show that, according to their impres-

sions of each other, most Frenchmen are singularly forbearing towards their wives: they do not make the most of them—that effort is limited to the rare examples which were alluded to just now—but their habit is to treat them with much softness, with constant consideration, with deference and courtesy. They generally come together, in the origin, without much passion, or, indeed, much love; the conditions under which their marriages are arranged make that fact easily comprehensible; but love does grow up between them in nearly every case, and they end by feeling for each other an attachment quite as real, as thorough, and as deep, as we find in countries where other systems are in use. It is far from easy to discover really unhappy marriages in France. Here and there are isolated instances, evident to every one, for they have terminated in voluntary separation; but the testimony of society, and particularly of the women, who are not more charitable towards each other in France than they are in other lands, in no way indicates any multiplicity of failures. The impossibility of divorce creates a strong motive for mutual concessions, with the object of soothing away asperities, and of rendering obligatory companionship supportable, if not agreeable. As for absolute infidelity, on either side, it is now so rare that it is often possible to look round a large circle

of intimate acquaintance without being able to point out one example of it. This assertion may seem absurd and false to that large group of English people, which, though in total ignorance of the facts, grows up, lives, and dies in the contrary conviction; but the assertion is strictly, literally true. The marriage-tie is vigorously felt in France: husbands and wives cleave there to each other, and do not now seek for illicit joys, whatever some of them may have done in days gone by. Indeed, they point to England at this moment as the country which produces palpably the largest amount of conjugal irregularity; and quote in proof, with bitter justice, the shameless details of the Divorce Court which are given in our newspapers. We have grown accustomed to this odious publicity—habit blinds us to its dangers and its indecency; but if we could hear foreigners talk about it,—if we knew the impression of disgust which it creates in France, where the rare cases of co-respondency are treated criminally, and are always pleaded with closed doors—where husbands do not receive money-damages for their wife's dishonour,—we should perhaps be led to recognise that, in this question, we do not offer a satisfying spectacle to Europe, and that we have lost all right to throw stones at others. We are unable to judge ourselves on such a subject; we

must submit to the verdict of lookers-on; and a very painful one it is for us to support.

But if the French are less attackable than we are on this element of the workings out of marriage, they are open in another direction to a founded imputation to which allusion has been already made, and which is almost graver still, because its application, instead of being exceptional, is universal. Their marriages produce scarcely any children. Here discussion is needless; here differences of opinion cannot exist; here prejudices cannot apply, —for the fact is proved by their own official returns. Before the Revolution of 1789 the population of France amounted to about 24,000,000, and the annual number of births was about 970,000. At this moment the population is about 37,000,000, and the average number of births is only 950,000 per annum. In other words, though the population is one-half larger than it was a hundred years ago, it begets absolutely fewer children now than then. The present yearly birth-rate in France is the lowest in the world. In Germany it represents 1 in 25 of the entire population, in England it is 1 in 30, in France it is only 1 in 39. And it must be borne in mind that this diminution does not result from any falling off in the proportionate rate of marriage, which, as has been stated, keeps up its place in comparison with other countries. It is

solely brought about by the wilful refusal of married people to become fathers and mothers, as married people do elsewhere. A topic of such a nature is awkward to dissect, but it constitutes one of the salient facts of the subject, and it could not be omitted without leaving a great gap in the discussion; it forms one of its striking features, and it necessarily exercises an important influence on the opinion to be formed. The rejection of paternity is a consequence of the excessive prudence with which the entire subject is handled by the French: they do not marry unless they think they can afford it; they do not have children unless they think they can provide for them. It in no way affects the attachment between man and wife; it in no way diminishes their affection for their children, when they have them. On the contrary, their family tenderness is demonstrative and excessive, as has been repeated many times throughout these sketches of their home life. But the mere existence of this resolute unwillingness to have children, places France in a low position before Europe, and suggests grave doubts as to the moral value and efficacy of a system which, whatever be its merits and its qualities, whatever be the happiness which it produces, results in so flagrant a negation of the first object and first duty of marriage. It may perhaps be denied that it forms an inherent part of

the entire scheme; it may perhaps be argued that it is an accident, a temporary tendency; it may perhaps be urged that the general organisation of married life in France should not be held responsible for it: but to such objections it may be fairly answered, that the tendency in question, instead of assuming a temporary aspect, has gone on steadily gaining strength for a hundred years; that during the present generation its development has coincided with an increase of wealth, which ought, apparently, to have brought about an exactly opposite effect; and that it is, consequently, quite reasonable to regard it as a definitely-adopted policy.

Now, whatever be the value, in political economy, of the principle of "circumspection in marriage" with which Malthus has associated his name, there are but few of us who can look at it with approbation from a moral or a social point of view; and though he himself, if he were still alive, might be immensely gratified to find that an entire nation is realising his ideas on the largest scale, we, who in this case are but simple critics of the results of married life in their natural and habitual form, may be allowed to view the matter otherwise. Abstract theories about movements of population, and about proportions between demand and supply, can never be got into the heads of people who regard mar-

riage as we all do, not only as an institution destined to give personal contentment to those who profit by it, but, quite as much, as a link between successive generations. How, then, can we help recoiling, with a good deal of really felt disgust, from the insufficient use of marriage which is so evident in France? And yet, strong as this feeling may be in us, it must not lead us to exaggeration. The rule is proved by the figures which have been quoted. There is no doubt about its application in the majority of cases; but there are exceptions in abundance; the whole nation is not infected: there are still in France a good many people who trust in God, and not in Mr Malthus. That too intelligent Englishman is not, however, the inspirer of French peasants in the matter; scarcely any of them have ever heard his name: they execute what he advised; they work out his teaching, but without knowing what he taught. Their motive is individual, not national. They have no idea that they are practising political philosophy when they tell you, as they do, that "il faut faire la soupe avant de faire l'enfant."

The exceptions are, happily, sufficiently numerous to give some little brightness to a picture which would otherwise be so dark. There are, here and there, large families in France, and nowhere can more admirable illustrations of pure home life be

found than those they offer. It is, perhaps, especially in the upper sections of society that those examples are to be found; the trading and working classes have, ordinarily, so little religion and so little elevation of moral convictions, that they abound the other way; and, as they constitute the mass, it is they, almost alone, who have brought about the decline in the progress of population. It is therefore not unjust to say in principle, subject, of course, to reservations on both sides, that the higher ranks are now multiplying in France more rapidly than the lower strata. This progress is of course imperceptible materially, but in its degree it certainly exists.

Another, but a very different question, which it is worth while to look at, is the influence of society, or, more exactly, of social relations, on the results of marriage. Evidence upon it is very plentiful and easy to collect; for we have but to listen to the talk when half-a-dozen people are together. Whatever be the class which we observe, we find on this head a general similarity of action and effects. Notwithstanding their great love of home, Frenchwomen live a good deal with each other and with men: their form of life is so free from the restrictions and the obstacles which we impose upon ourselves—there is generally so much liberty and facility of visiting at all hours of the day and

evening—that the contact between acquaintances attains a frequency of which we have no idea. In the higher classes some few husbands go to clubs, or live somewhat in their own rooms; but such cases are exceptions: with them, as in the middle groups, husbands are ordinarily with their wives, accompany them wherever they can, and share their friendships and their distractions. With so eminently sociable a race it is natural that this should be so, and the disposition is confirmed by the original conditions of marriage, which always—as much as possible, at least—provide for the maintenance of family connections afterwards. The French do not regard marriage as a state in which two people are to be tied up by themselves; they view it as an association, which should in no way affect the habitual contact between the parties to it and the rest of the world outside. Of course, in practice, everybody remains free to select his or her own system of existence. There are examples, and a good many too, of married people who stop at home, "qui vivent en sauvages," as their neighbours say of them; but they constitute the exceptions—the rule is the other way. The faculty of making visits, and walking about alone, and going to parties without a chaperon, is proper to all girls who marry, whatever be their country; the French have no monopoly of it. It is not therefore

as an act of freedom that newly-married Frenchwomen go into society; they do it because they like it, because their husbands like it, because it is the habit of their nation. The idea that marriage confers any special liberty on Frenchwomen is most erroneous; they have neither more nor less of it than women possess elsewhere. It is, however, comprehensible that the contrast between that degree of liberty and the extreme reserve in which the girls are kept (which we perhaps should do well to imitate), should have provoked amongst us the false impression that a French wife acquires a greater emancipation than other European wives enjoy. She remains bound by the universal laws which regulate the conduct and the attitude of women; she obtains no peculiar rights; she shakes off no chains; she does but gain the position and the power which enable her to discharge the new duties which devolve upon her. Foremost amongst those duties is the obligation to maintain her social place. She likes the obligation; it costs her no effort to discharge it; and, in most cases, she would annoy and disappoint her husband if she neglected it. So they go about together and amuse themselves, as a right and proper thing to do; it is one of the objects for which they married.

In limits such as these it can scarcely be alleged that the habit of social intercourse, highly developed

though it be in France, constitutes a danger for home peace. There are crowds of married people there who never stop at home, whose life is almost exclusively passed with others: but if they all like it, there is no harm in that; it is only when one side is discontented with the practice, while the other wilfully continues it, that it grows into an obstacle. This case exists, of course, but it is rare: most French men and women like society too much for either of them to shrink away from it.

This constant contact with other people has, however, the inconvenience of provoking vanities and envies, and consequently of leading women to expense. There lies, perhaps, the only serious objection to it which can be urged as regards its influence on married life. It cannot be seriously said, by any one who knows the French, that it at all affects their regular attention to their home duties, especially towards their children, who are thought of and cared for before all else; but it is not possible to deny that it tempts the women on to dress, and to the other rivalries which drawing-rooms provoke. But most French husbands rather like their wives to shine, and look on complacently at the effect which they produce, and at the triumphs which they achieve. The association between them is generally intimate enough for each of them to find satisfaction in the other's

glories, even if they take only the tiny form of a successful gown. So, if they can afford it, the additional outlay which is induced by much going out does not become a source of difficulty between them. Whether it does them any good, whether it aids them to really love each other better, whether it elevates their views, may certainly be doubted; but as it amuses and contents them—as it gives them a common object in life, such as it is—we may admit that, with their ideas, they are right to hold to it.

Even in the trading classes there is a good deal of this seeking for society, in a small way. There, however, the wife usually assumes a position of a peculiar kind. She does not visit so much with her husband at night, but she is his companion throughout the day, wherever the nature of his occupation makes it possible that she should remain with him; she participates in his life, she shares his cares, she helps him in his work. At the top of the scale, the French wife is a woman of the world; at the bottom of it she is a drudge, as is the case in other lands; but in the lower middle strata she takes a special place by her husband's side,—so sympathetic, so cordially real, that to many of us she presents a high realisation of the idea of what a wife should be. It is only in the central ranks of population that we find fair

average national examples; above and below those ranks, both wealth and poverty come into play, and introduce conditions of existence which diminish the teaching value of the classes which they influence. But in the *bourgeoisie*, which constitutes in its various degrees so large an element of the French nation, we find the unadulterated type of France. It is there that we should look for the speaking signs of a general state; and is these signs are cheering, if they indicate success, if they testify that satisfactory ends are reached, we may surely conclude that good causes are at work; and we may, consequently and fairly, arrive at the opinion that, whatever be its faults, the system is not all bad, and that, on the contrary, it renders possible a form of home unity which is peculiar to the race.

It is not by mere comparison with the results obtained elsewhere that we can safely judge this question. Each people has its own special needs, its own special means of satisfying them. A great many of us are disposed to positively deny that the thorough oneness of existence, which is so distinctive a characteristic of married life in the French middle and trading classes, is, in reality, a merit. The subject has been many times discussed from the English point of view, and it has been generally alleged that the absorption of

women into the hourly details of their husbands' lives involves more disadvantages than advantages. It has been argued frequently that it leaves no time for the discharge of the duties which specially devolve on women; that it diverts their thoughts to subjects which are foreign to their natures; that it leads them to neglect their children. But are these objections founded? Are they not mainly, if not entirely, a product of the widely different habits under which we live? And, even if they are based on fact, do they express a just and serious criticism of conditions of home life, which, from the widely opposite practices in which we grow up, we are unable to appreciate with fairness? Surely it may be urged, that every act which fortifies the tie between man and wife is not only respectable in theory but desirable in practice. Surely a true appreciation of the relative values of the different services which a wife can render, of the different joys which she can provoke, can be more exactly reached by the husband himself than by distant lookers-on, who, unconsciously perhaps, bring all their own prejudices into the discussion. If, then, we find, as we distinctly do, that the French themselves proclaim the merit of the adjunction of the wife to her husband's labours; if we see that the association which is entailed by marriage is regarded by them as applicable not

only to sentimental ends, but to the practical details of life as well; if women, as a consequence of this view, sit by the side of men in offices and shops, instead of leaving them to work through the day alone,—we ought, in justice, to acknowledge not only that the persons directly interested must be better able to decide than we are, but, furthermore, that such constant presence, such constant sympathy of object and of thought, must tend to strengthen the bond between them, and must augment their friendship. On this point, therefore, we may admit that the French habit is a wise one.

As regards intellectual progress, marriage ordinarily leads the French to nothing. The notion that wife and husband may usefully help each other on such a road seems not to enter their heads, unless, in special cases, where the acquirement of knowledge, or its distribution to others, constitutes the occupation of life. When once they have left off schooling, the French cease to study; they continue what they call their "education," but they give up "instruction." The two words are here employed in the sense which is peculiar to France —the former meaning moral and social teaching only, the latter implying solely book-learning in its various forms. They continue to improve themselves as men and women, as towards their soul (when they think they have one) or towards the

world at large; but they abandon the attempt to add to what they learned in books when young. These descriptions are of course general, not universal; but their application is so usual that they need not be accompanied by any special reservations. With such views and practices, it is natural enough that marriage should introduce no new ideas of action. A husband may push his wife towards art, though that depends on his or her proclivities; but scarcely ever will he think of leading her to read, or of communicating to her what he may know himself. In quantities of drawing-rooms in France an open book is never seen; in some of them even newspapers are exceptional objects. This does not refer to the higher classes, where, frequently, there does exist some desire for new facts; but the want of books on the tables of the *bourgeoisie* creates a cheerless blank which no profusion of plants or flowers can fill up. Sometimes one observes two or three stately volumes in red morocco, which evidently are never looked at, and probably have never been read; all they do is to confirm the thought that their proprietors look to other people, and not to print, for fresh impressions. But conversation, whatever be its merit, whatever be the clever uses made of it, does not replace reading as a developer of knowledge; all it does is to enable us to use knowledge if we have it. In this direc-

tion French married life is far inferior to our own. Our women read; our men generally feel some sort of interest in what their wives are learning; and without pretending that marriage is, with us, an aid to study, it is so certainly when we compare it to what occurs in France. Music, on the contrary, is more general in French houses than in ours; art is more keenly felt and more naturally utilised. There marriage serves an end, for it is particularly after marriage that Frenchwomen attain the skill which distinguishes them in all the forms of indoor adornment, which means the daily application of the home shapes of art. To this the husbands contribute a good deal; in this they help their wives. But, whatever be the value of such action, whatever be the additional attraction bestowed on home by this common effort to add charm to it, the absence of the higher tendencies of intelligence implies an inferiority of object which is one of the weak points of the entire system. The sentiments find full satisfaction in most French marriages—the affections are contented—family duties are attentively and even eagerly performed—home is decorated, so far as the purse allows, with the wise ambition of rendering it more seductive; but there is little culture of the intelligence, and the pleasures which that culture is capable of producing in marriage are relatively unknown.

Even in the country reading does not assume an important place amongst the occupations of the day: there is more of it than in the towns, but not enough to justify the statement that it constitutes an element of life. As there is less society in the chateau and the village than in the centres of population, wives have to look for something else than gossip to enable them to pass their hours. Home cares absorb a considerable portion of their time—visits to the sick and poor, which few women of the better sort neglect, contribute to employ it; but reading seldom becomes a constant object, even when it rains. The 'Revue des Deux Mondes,' or the 'Correspondant,' according to the opinions of the house, and translations of a few English novels, constitute the habitual limit of female study. With all their inventiveness, the French have not discovered that reading is not only the most natural but also the most useful of home occupations; so, as a rule, their marriages do without it.

There is one more point to glance at. What is the influence of religion on married life in France, and how does marriage influence the practice of religion? The solution of such a question depends on personal opinion in every case, but it is not, perhaps, impossible to give a proximately correct reply to it as a whole. All French children begin

by faith; many of the girls preserve it, most of the boys abandon it, in varying degrees on both sides. The result is, that when a man and a woman come together in marriage, the woman frequently believes, the man habitually does not. They therefore pretty often start in life with a tolerably complete divergence on a grave subject, which, if they thought alike upon it, would serve, on the contrary, to create a further tie between them. But there is abundant evidence to show that this divergence exercises but small effect on the sentiments of wife and husband towards each other, and even that the divergence itself is often more apparent than real. If we apply to the better sort of women for information, we are generally informed that their husbands leave them alone, do not interfere with their discharge of their religious duties, and even, in certain cases, accompany them to church as a matter of propriety. In the educated classes it is rare to meet with men who are actively hostile to religion. Many of them say that they regard it as a worn-out means of civilisation, as an unnecessary complication, as a bar to progress; but, whatever they may say in words, scarcely any of them go beyond passive indifference in acts. No simpler or more conclusive proof of this can be adduced than the fact that one hardly ever sees a father, whatever be the intensity of his views, pre-

vent his son from making his first communion. Full of incredulity as the majority of them are, the upper French feel, in spite of themselves, a sort of vague respect for what they believed as boys. However complete be their loss of faith, they unconsciously retain, in most cases, a sentiment of hesitating deference for religion which makes it difficult for them to take up a strong attitude against it towards their wives. The result is, that the distance between their respective views, however considerable it be, is not unfrequently bridged over by mutual forbearances and concessions; so that, really, no practical dissentiment arises, and no home difficulty results from the want of community of faith. This sort of negative contentment is, however, possible only in cases where no passion is displayed on either side upon the subject; when husbands and wives are eager in the matter, when they set actively to work to convert each other, then they generally end in worry. But if they are patient, and wait for the effect of all the influences which the constant contact of married life places at their disposal, then, not unfrequently, they do end by conversion—that is, the conversion of the husband; for, though there are quantities of men who are led by their wives to faith, there is hardly a woman to be found who has been led by her husband to infidelity.

These considerations apply mainly to the upper classes. The case presents a different aspect if we examine it in the strata where socialism is at work. There the desire to root out all religion is resolute and active; there we find that many husbands use the power which marriage gives them to destroy faith in their wives. The exceptions are, however, numerous, even in the towns. It is naturally very difficult to arrive at any reliable figures on such a subject; but it seems to result, from private observations made by the clergy, and extending over many years, that about one-tenth of the entire population of France goes to Communion at Easter, which is the test of Catholic practice. It seems, furthermore, that, on that occasion, the women are about eight times as numerous as the men. So that, uniting these two calculations, and allowing for the number of young children whose age excludes them from participation in the act, it would appear as if about one quarter of the women and about one twenty-fifth of the men discharge this obligatory religious duty. But it must be repeated that these averages apply to the nation as a whole; the proportions are of course much higher amongst the educated, and lower still amongst the working classes. These figures show (even if they be only approximately correct) how limited is the influence which the practice of religion is exercising on mar-

ried life in France; and as the averages are certainly not improving, it may be inferred from them that marriage is not now aiding the progress of religion. The French are growing out of faith, as out of the other convictions which they formerly possessed; and even marriage, with all its subtle means of action, does not appear to be leading them back to it.

If from consideration of the separate phases of the subject we turn back to it as a whole, and review its elements in their relation to each other, we find ourselves in the presence of contradictions which, at first sight, do not seem easy to reconcile, and which might induce us to suppose that the question can only be safely judged in its isolated elements, and not in its entirety. But, notwithstanding the conflicting nature of the evidence, notwithstanding the hostility of the main facts between themselves, it ought not to be impossible to disentangle the opposing details from each other, and to reach a general impression.

We find that marriages in France are surrounded by peculiar obstacles, both personal and legal; that individual predilections form but a small element in their origin; that antecedent attachments are not considered indispensable; that the precept "increase and multiply" is not admitted as a binding law. So far the system looks unhealthy,

according to our appreciation of what marriage should be. On the other hand, we see that the French marry rather more than we do; that, in nineteen cases out of twenty, the love which did not exist beforehand grows up afterwards; that there is little material misery resulting from imprudent marrying; that separations are rare and divorce impossible; that French homes, in almost every rank, are generally attractive models of gentleness and kindness; that, in certain cases, the pursuit of mutual happiness is based on theories and practices in which the highest forms of skill are successfully employed; that children, few though they be, are fondly cherished; that the association between man and wife assumes, in the lower middle classes, an intensity of partnership for which it is not easy to find a parallel elsewhere; that religion, if it does no good to marriage, cannot be said to really suffer harm from it.

In endeavouring to estimate the real bearings on each other of these two different categories of facts, we may remain convinced that French parents interfere too much in the marrying of their sons and daughters; we may reject as insufficient and illusory, from our point of view, the arguments which they invoke in favour of that intervention; we may point with unanswerable logic to the relatively childless firesides of France as

evidence that, whatever be their love for children, the French shrink purposely from having them;—but, with all this before us, we are obliged to own that they do extract large results from matrimony. The love of home, which we observe so universally amongst them, is, in itself, a proof of the existence of attraction between man and wife; and attraction implies sympathy. This symptom should suffice alone to remove all reasonable doubt as to the reality of the affection which unites most French families. But if affection is a consequence of marriage, it seems to follow that the system on which marriages are based cannot be a very bad one for those who use it. A somewhat similar argument may be employed with reference to the children. The moral wrong of avoiding them cannot be explained away; but, when they do come, they are tenderly cherished, and aid in strengthening the bond between their parents. If, then, as is incontestably the case, the great majority of French married people love each other and their offspring, it may not unreasonably be deduced therefrom that the difficulties and contradictions which seem at first sight to result from the opposing elements of the position, do not bring about the effects which, with our ideas, we should expect them to produce.

Questions such as these depend a good deal

on temperament. The French are not organised as we are; they differ from us in the composition of their character and their tendencies to a degree which it is scarcely possible to realise without close comparison. The same beginnings do not necessarily result in the same ends in England and in France. As was observed at the commencement of this chapter, it is fair to judge a system by its fruits; and if we apply that principle to French marriages, we ought to own that a system which leads to so much fondness, to so much happiness, to such true home life, cannot be fundamentally wrong, whatever certain of its details may incline us to suppose.

THE END.

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